

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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NO. 659.—VOL. XXVI.

FOR THE WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 18, 1875.

[PRICE { WITH CHRISTMAS } TWO PENCE. { SUPPLEMENT.]



[BLACK MAIL.]

SNOWDRIFT:

A STORY FOR CHRISTMAS.

CHAPTER I.

I know a maiden fair to see,
Take care!
She can both false and friendly be,
Beware, beware!
Trust her not, she is fooling thee.

SOUNDS of music and revelry floated upon the night air.

A grand public ball was taking place in a fashionable hall at the West End. For hours a constant succession of carriages had drawn up at the stately portal, and splendidly dressed ladies, hanging upon the arms of gentlemen, ascended the steps leading to the room in which the dancing took place, laughing and talking merrily, as if the whole business of life was enjoyment, and they meant to be very business-like indeed.

The dresses of the ladies were really superb, and a few uniforms relieved the monotony of the sombre but decorous black coat which is de rigueur for evening wear with all gentlemen, the happy possessors of these finding much favour in the admiring eyes of the fair sex.

When the music ceased after each dance the joyous laugh broke out again, and the hum of conversation rose above all as the gentlemen walked round the spacious ball-room with their lovely partners, who seemed to have taxed the art of the modiste to the utmost in their personal adornment. All that was noteworthy of rank was present, for the ball was in aid of a deserving charity, to which majesty itself had lent its patronage, and the high price charged for admission only made the gathering more popular with the élite of London society.

About eleven o'clock an ordinary hack cab, contrasting strangely with the gorgeous and magnificent

equipages of the nobility and diplomatic representatives, drove up, and a lady, quite alone, alighted. Drawing her opera cloak close around her shoulders to protect herself from the wintry wind which blew down the street, she tripped across the pavement, and was conducted to the ball-room by one of the stewards.

She did not appear to know any one, nor was anybody apparently acquainted with her, though many stared somewhat rudely at her as she made her way across the crowded apartment, towards a vacant seat which she happened to notice. The men looked at her because she was undeniably lovely, and her appearance commanded their admiration.

With the ladies it was different. With them envy took the place of admiration, and a lofty pride was mingled with a half-sneer of contemptuous disdain.

Her dress was very plain, consisting of white muslin, simply adorned with a few bows of cerise ribbon, tastily arranged, while in her jet black hair was a red camellia. She was about the middle height, very graceful and symmetrical, having regular features, such as Phidias, the Grecian sculptor, would have loved to fashion. Her neck was long and swan-like, her form rounded and voluptuous, and her little feet peeped out prettily from beneath the skirts of her dress.

In her delicately gloved hand she carried a splendid fan of sandal wood. Two pieces of coral hung pendant from her ears, and it was worthy of notice that these plain earrings were the only ornaments she wore. Whether it was that the simplicity of her attire, or the calm beauty of her face, behind which there lurked a subtle witchery, attracted attention, certain it is that she was the observed of all observers, and a whisper ran round the gay and festive throng: "Who is she?" No one could give an answer, and she at once established herself as the mystery of the evening.

Duchesses loaded with diamonds, countesses decked out with a thousand pounds' worth of lace, ladies who

thought their costumes a marvel of taste and costliness, and who had spent extraordinary pains to make them so, were bitterly annoyed to find that all the gentlemen in the room would persist in casting inquisitive, if not admiring glances in the direction of the fair unknown, whose whole attire did not presumably cost more than a few pounds.

The lady herself seemed serenely unconscious of the notice she attracted, for she sat very still and watched the evolutions of the dancers, now whirling round in the mazy valse, and anon moving in stately measure to the more dignified and less boisterous gaudrille. She more resembled a spectator at a theatre than anything else, and was, to all appearance, intensely interested in seeing others enjoy themselves without evincing any inclination to follow their example.

Her lovely black eyes flashed hither and thither, but did not meet the eyes of any one else. She might have been an Eastern queen looking on at a periodical "nautch" or exhibition of dancing girls, which she secretly despised, though, as a custom of the country, she felt bound to encourage and call amusing.

There was one young man who was very much struck with the figure and face of this lady. He could not take his dark eyes from her, and his mother, who had accompanied him to the ball, rallied him for keeping in a particular part of the room and refraining from dancing.

He had been standing, or rather leaning, against the wall for half an hour in a position which gave him a good view of the unknown without permitting her to think that she was subjected to anything like a prolonged or offensive notice. Yet it was so, and his mother, seeing the impropriety of which he was guilty, left her seat and went over to remonstrate with him.

His name was Donbigh Fearn. His father had been dead some years, and he was just of age, and had come into property worth between three and

four thousands a-year. He was tall and very fair, certainly good looking, but perhaps too quiet, earnest, and even sad in his manner to please most tastes.

The expression of his face was honest and amanly; he had a thin moustache, and whiskers which were of a moderate size, though not full or luxuriant.

Mrs. Fearon had purposely bought tickets for this ball, in order that he might see a little gay life, for he had not left the public school where he was educated more than a year, and had but a slight knowledge of the world and society. Having so ample an income, and his mother being well provided for, he had adopted no profession, though he had a fancy for going into the army. That was a subject under the consideration of his friends and himself.

"Pray," said Mrs. Fearon, "do be a little more like a man of the world. Every one will notice the attention you are bestowing upon that woman, whom nobody knows. I am sure there is nothing superlatively attractive about her. Come with me, and be introduced to the Countess of Chesterley and her daughters. They are charming girls, and all the men are dying to dance with them. It was but a few minutes ago that I was talking to their godmother."

"Excuse me, my dear mother," replied Denbigh Fearon, in a respectful but resolute tone, "I cannot do as you wish, for the peace of my future life depends upon an introduction to the lady whom you call 'that woman that nobody knows.' I must know her, talk to her, and dance with her, for I am firmly persuaded that in her I have met my fate."

"What nonsense you talk!" exclaimed Mrs. Fearon, with some signs of impatience. "Your vivid imagination has led you astray, and your limited acquaintance with fashionable life has induced you to make an idol of what is really only an ordinary mortal. Now, oblige me by coming to the concert, and you shall dance with Lady Maud Chesterley, who, in my opinion, is the belle of the room. She is dark in the night, and you, I know, admire dark beauties."

Denbigh shook his head.

"It is the first time I ever refused a request, or hesitated to obey a command of yours, dear mother," he said; "but to-night there is a wild impulse raging in my breast which compels me to have my own way. Mother, I must know that lady. If you value my peace of mind—if you have any regard for me—help me to the accomplishment of my wish. Will you?—can you?"

"Upon my word, Denbigh," rejoined Mrs. Fearon, still with accents of displeasure, "I know not what to say. From questions I have asked, and remarks I have overheard, the woman—I beg your pardon, the lady," she added, as she saw he was hurt at the disrespectful way in which she spoke of his divinity—"is a total stranger to every one in the room. I daresay an introduction can be effected, though, by one of the stewards, or the master of the ceremonies—if there is such an important personage here to-night. It is a thing best managed by yourself, however."

"Thank you," said Denbigh Fearon, a little coldly. "I will do as you suggest, since I can expect no help from you; though I must say I do not myself see the harm of humouring a passing fancy. I am capable of taking care of my own interest, and—"

"But not of your heart, my dear boy," interrupted his mother, in a tone of solicitude. "You are at a most susceptible age, and I do beg you to be careful. Though the people here are admitted by vouchers, it is, nevertheless, a public ball, and you may compromise yourself irretrievably. My alarm may be foolish and unfounded. If so, forgive the anxiety of a mother."

Denbigh Fearon smiled, and assured her that he would not do anything to displease her; but if the sky were to fall as a consequence of his act, he must talk to the unknown, and solicit her hand for a dance.

So he walked away, and, meeting one of the gentlemen acting as stewards, who was distinguished by a rosette upon his arm, he accosted him, and asked for an introduction to the lady whom he indicated.

The steward at once promised compliance, and, going to the lady, spoke a few words, after which he returned to Denbigh, whom he asked to follow him, saying that he had ascertained her name to be Miss Leonie Layland, and he had obtained her permission to introduce him.

The introduction was made in due form, and Mr. Fearon soon found the full, lustrous eyes fixed upon and burning into him, searching every lineament of his countenance, and peering straight into the depths of his easily-read heart.

Asking her to dance, he offered his arm, and they took a preliminary promenade, until the music, then hushed, commenced anew.

Miss Leonie Layland was a most accomplished dancer, and hung like a feather on his shoulder. The curiosity which she had attracted, and which had somewhat subsided, rose again now, and was extended to her partner, who was so absorbed in the pleasure of talking and dancing that he bore the ordeal bravely, simply because he was unconscious that many eyes were upon him.

The dance over, he asked her to take some refreshment, which she declined; but he would not conduct her to her seat at once, so he made an excuse about the heat, and led her to an ante-room filled with shrubs and flowers after the style of a winter garden, where they could promenade agreeably.

"Do you go out much, Miss Layland?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she replied. "I scarcely know why I am here to-night. I am poor, unfriended, an orphan, whom no one takes any interest in. No, I am wrong; there is one who exerts himself slightly in my behalf, or I should not have come here this evening. He said I required gaiety, which to me was almost an unknown word. You, I suppose, are a votary of fashion and one of fortune's favourites, Mr. Fearon?"

He did not see how artfully this question was put, in his unassuming way, replied frankly to it:

"I am not that any more than yourself. As to being a favourite of fortune, I have nearly four thousand a year of my own, left me by my father, which I have just come into, but I know little of the world and less of society, and the little I do know does not please me very well."

"How strange," she exclaimed, with a fascinating smile and another glance of those dangerous eyes, "that our dispositions should be of so congenial a nature. I detest the empty show and glitter of the world, and think that happiness is alone to be found, either in town or country, in the sweet communion of two loving hearts. What have I said?" she cried, in alarm, while her face flushed. "I have been talking to you as if you were my brother. What a child I am! But you will forgive me?"

"Willingly," he promptly replied. "There is a charm in your spontaneous candour which no amount of artificial training could supply, and I freely admit that to me is delightful, as such a view of earthly bliss is just what has suggested itself to me times out of mind. The music is beginning again; shall I take you to your seat?"

"If you will be so good," she replied.

"May I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again?" he continued. "Really, I should be very proud to make your acquaintance. I hope I have not offended you by the expression of such a wish. I am quite in earnest in saying that I should be deeply grieved if our knowledge of one another were to end here."

"I am really not worthy of your notice, Mr. Fearon," answered Leonie, while the long lashes drooped as if in sorrow over her witching eyes. "From what you have been good enough to tell me, I am convinced that our paths in life are distinct. Here, however, is my business address, at which you will hear of me."

She gave him an envelope which contained a letter, and which she had in the pocket of her dress, and he thanked her for it.

The music now began with a deafening power, for they were near the orchestra, and he led her to her seat in silence, bowed with marked deference, and walked away, thinking much of his lovely partner, who had aroused his sympathy for her forlorn condition; and every one knows that pity is akin to love.

Perhaps Leonie Layland was fully aware of this important fact; if so, she had made use of a powerful weapon, for Denbigh Fearon, without knowing it, had fallen desperately in love with her at first sight, and was hopelessly her slave, with all the violent emotion of a first and profound passion.

CHAPTER II.

In order to oblige his mother, Denbigh Fearon acceded to her wish, and was introduced to the Countess of Chesterley and her daughters, and danced with both the Lady Maud and Lady Julia Chesterley, when he left Miss Leonie Layland, though he derived little enjoyment from their society, so completely was his heart given away in another direction.

An hour or more elapsed before he could obtain his freedom, and he went in search of Leonie to ask permission to escort her to the supper-room, but she

was nowhere to be found. She had gone home probably. Like a meteor, she had burst upon the astonished assembly and vanished.

Much concerned at her disappearance, Denbigh went into a retired corner and looked at the envelope which she had given him. He was particularly anxious to know what she meant by her business address.

Could it be possible that a creature so dainty and so spirituous should be compelled by the decrees of a harsh fate to work for her living?

For the first time since he had come of age he blessed the good fortune which had given him money, because he could lay it at her feet and save her from the annoyance of ever again toiling for the means of existence.

The envelope was directed to Miss Leonie Layland, care of Mr. Sharpe, music-seller and pianoforte maker, Lower Eaton Street, Belgrave.

The inference which he drew from this was that she was well acquainted with music, and a teacher of the piano, or singing—perhaps both.

This did not in any way decrease his regard for her. He went into raptures over the independent spirit he fancied she possessed, and held her in higher esteem on account of her supposed poverty.

While he was engaged in meditation oblivious of the ball, the music, and his gay patrons, Mrs. Fearon, who had missed and gone in search of him, discovered her love-sick son with the address in his hand, looking very sentimental and absorbed by his own thoughts.

She became grave instantly, and regarded him with an expression of pity mingled with concern, but wisely refrained from saying anything to him that moment which might create a feeling of irritation in his breast.

She contented herself with observing that if he would kindly conduct her to the supper-room she would partake of some slight refreshment, and then be at his service to return home.

It was, she thought, with some reluctance that he offered his arm, which was slender, for he had often expressed his almost love and veneration for his mother, declaring that he would rather spend his time in the company of the "old lady," as he called her, than in that of the most fascinating young enchantress that Belgrave could produce.

His fondness for his mother was with him an intuition or a principle, and this was the first time that he had appeared to swerve from it; but it must be remembered that he had just fallen in love, and was no longer perfect master of his thoughts and actions.

After supper he was glad to go home. He ate little and talked less. Denbigh Fearon, usually so full of spirited conversation, which all his friends considered it a treat to listen to, was comparatively dumb.

His mother pretended not to notice his preoccupation, and simulated sleep in a corner of their carriage.

The next day Denbigh was up early, and his eyes were a little swollen, as if he had not slept much.

Mrs. Fearon began to fear that the symptoms were alarming. She had known all along that her son must sooner or later fall in love; but she prayed earnestly that the objects of his affection might be worthy of him. She, who had watched his progress from his infancy, knew him to be good as well as susceptible, and she trembled lest some woman greatly inferior to himself in every way should become mistress of his heart, and so blight all the bright future that was before him.

She knew the evil of bad marriages and the miseries of ill-assorted couples, and the worry, and the despair which follows a union of inclination but not of judgment.

Her son's welfare was far, far dearer to her than her own, and she determined to grapple with the difficulty at once.

It was delicate ground that she was treading upon, but she could not help that. She had a duty to perform, and she did not shrink from its performance at the earliest possible opportunity which presented itself.

"You will pardon me, Denbigh," she said after breakfast, "but I want to unburden my mind to you, and I shall feel glad if you will treat me with a similar confidence. I have taken it into my head that the young lady with whom you danced last night has made a great—I will not say irrevocable—impression upon you."

"Which young lady do you allude to? I danced with several," exclaimed Denbigh Fearon.

"The fair unknown. May I call her so without giving offence to you?"

"Certainly, and I will admit freely that your suspicions are correct. I have her address, and I know what she is. She gave me to understand that she was poor and friendless, and an orphan. The address she allowed me to take away with me is convincing as to her avocation."

"What, then, is this paragon?" asked Mrs. Fearon.

"Read, and judge for yourself," he replied, handing her the envelope.

"Well," said Mrs. Fearon, after a pause, "suppose that Miss Leonie Layland is poor, friendless, an orphan, and a music-mistress? What then, Denbigh?"

"Suppose, in addition, my dear mother," he said, enthusiastically, "that she is peerless in her commanding beauty, accomplished in her conversation, engaging in her manner, marvellously symmetrical in her form, good-hearted, innocent, trusting—in short, a woman that a man only meets with once in his life?"

"I am not going to suppose any such nonsense," answered Mrs. Fearon, who was practical and unbiased by any sentimental passion. "The girl is good-looking, I admit, but she is not nearly so nice as either of Lady Chesterly's daughters. You do not think enough of yourself, my dear boy. Look at your position and your income, which, though not princely, is ample to keep you in the upper ranks of society. The English aristocracy can boast of the most lovely women in the world. If you want to marry, you can marry a lady of rank, who has money as well as a title. With your looks and your fortune you can take your choice among the flowers of the beau monde."

"I make allowance for your partiality," rejoined Denbigh Fearon, with a smile. "I know you have a great, and, I fear, undeserved affection for me. But you seem to forget one thing, mother mine, and that is this: my position and my fortune, of which you are so proud, and which you esteem so highly, enable me to choose a wife from what I will—in deference to your prejudices—call a lower rank than my own. I will tell you frankly that I love Miss Layland without knowing her, and that I cannot rest until I see her again. I did not sleep last night; and if you value my health, my welfare, and my general happiness, you will place no obstacle in the way of my cultivation of Miss Layland's acquaintance."

"This is madness, Denbigh—sheer infatuation!" said his mother, who got up and paced the room uneasily.

"Call it what you will; I am its slave, and hers too. I told you last night that when I saw that girl I had met my fate," he answered, with a calmness which carried conviction with it.

"What do you propose to do?" exclaimed his mother, whose agitation increased.

"In the first place, I must see her again," he answered. "Have you any objection to call upon her? If you will do so, you will greatly oblige me. Make friends with Miss Layland, mother; have her here; go to her house, and you will then have an opportunity of studying her character. Any advice you give me I will lay to heart, and I promise you most sincerely that I will not act hastily under any circumstances whatever."

"You are my only son, Denbigh," answered his mother, whose tone had more of melancholy in it than was her wont. "I lost my husband, as you know, when you were a child, and all my love was concentrated on you and your elder brother. He, poor fellow!—he, my dear Carl, was stolen from the house by some malicious person, and whether he is dead or alive no one can possibly tell. You are all I have to be my comfort, solace, and support in my old age. Your brother Carl I have given up long ago, though I should know him again, as I have often told you, by a singular cross which he had between his shoulders. This peculiar mark was very distinct, and by its rarity would enable me to identify him. I repeat that I despair of ever seeing him again. You are my only hope and joy. If you marry a woman unworthy of you, or one with whom I feel I cannot associate, you will break my heart, Denbigh."

"But, my dear mother," cried Denbigh Fearon, "you judge the girl too hastily. You jump to conclusions. All I ask you is to go and see the lady."

"We had arranged to leave town next week."

"I know it. If your opinion of Miss Layland after you know her is favourable, as I am sanguine enough to hope it will be, why not invite her to visit you at Highfield Lodge? It is true that the place is my property, but you are its mistress, and ever shall be."

"I know your affection for me, Denbigh," returned Mrs. Fearon. "But I dread the influence of Miss Layland if she acquires any ascendancy over you. I fancy that I can read her character and disposition better than you."

"Your opinion is—"

"That she is clever and designing. She assumes the mask of innocence and simplicity to cover the deceit of her heart, and she is far from worthy of such a strong, sacred, and enduring affection as yours."

"You are right to call it enduring, mother," replied Denbigh Fearon, with a sigh. "When I love once, I feel I can never, never love again. Last night Miss Layland captivated me and stole my heart. I cannot help a wish to see her again. I am not the master of myself, and I repeat that if you love me you will call upon her, so that we may be on friendly terms."

"Leave this matter as it is until to-morrow," replied Mrs. Fearon. "I will think over it, and in the morning tell you what, in my opinion, is the best to be done under the perplexing and disastrous circumstances. Try and conquer this sudden fancy, combat it, fight with and wrestle with it as a temptation which should be resisted with all the force of one's will."

"To-morrow be it then," replied the young man, paying no heed to this exhortation.

It was in vain that Mrs. Fearon entreated her son to banish Miss Leonie Layland from his mind.

He was not, as he had truly said, master of himself. She had established an extraordinary dominion over his heart, and he was obliged to own its sway. His mother, finding him obstinate, or, more correctly, powerless, accordingly agreed to call with him upon Leonie, and invited her to return their visit.

She was, as they had assumed, a music-mistress. Mr. Sharpe, of Lower Eaton Street, knew absolutely nothing of her, except that she was an accomplished pianist, and that he had for the last two years constantly recommended her to his customers. She lodged in the neighbourhood, but he could supply no further information.

As they were talking, Miss Layland entered the shop. She was ladylike in her manner, not at all familiar, but rather respectful, as one who knew her position, though there was nothing forced or servile in her demeanour.

Mrs. Fearon spoke kindly to her, and expressed a wish to see her some evening when most convenient to herself at her house, as she was very fond of music, and would very much like to have a musical evening.

Miss Layland accepted the invitation, and excused herself for hurrying away, as she had some young ladies to give a lesson to in Belgrave Square, and she had only looked in at Mr. Sharpe's for a roll of music.

"Mr. Sharpe is my dear, good friend," she added. "It was Mr. Sharpe I spoke of the other night to you, Mr. Fearon. He gave me my ticket for the ball where I was fortunate enough to meet you, and, through you, make the acquaintance of your kind mother." This speech was accompanied by a bow. "Mr. Sharpe is benevolence itself. His music is well selected, and he allows me to patronise him in return for the encouragement he gives me."

Mrs. Fearon went away a little afterwards, but she still had her doubts about Miss Layland.

Denbigh's influence over his mother sufficed in time to induce her to give the young lady an invitation to Highfield Lodge, Derbyshire, for Christmas, which Leonie accepted with tears of gratitude.

"It is so good of you!" she said. "I do not know why you should take such an interest in a poor, friendless creature like myself—a poor girl dependent on her own exertions—living, as it were, precariously from day to day. It is a fact. I have no money but what I earn. But I will be very grateful to you—I will be as dutiful to you as a daughter, Mrs. Fearon. Could you fancy me as your daughter?"

"Well, no," replied Mrs. Fearon, rather quickly, "I don't think I could."

"Never mind, you are very kind to me. I will come to your house with pleasure, though it is years since I have spent a Christmas with friends. I may call you my friend, may I not?" said Leonie, all the dangerous light dying out of her brilliant eyes.

A look from Denbigh Fearon encouraged her.

"Usually," she added, "I have been all alone, thinking how melancholy my lot was, and what a solitary being in this busy world I was. Still, you shall not find me melancholy. I will sing and play for you, and try and talk so as to amuse you."

As Mrs. Fearon and her son went home he said:

"Is she not a sweet, amiable creature?"

"I don't know," rejoined his mother, who was anything at that moment but an amiable creature herself.

December was drawing to a close, and the weather was cold and wintry, as it should be at this time of the year. Ice and snow had both made their appearance, and King Frost had for some time been master of the situation.

Leonie Layland was invited to visit Mrs. Fearon at Highfield House, Derbyshire, any time during the third week in the month, and she came at the commencement, looking more lively than ever, and she thanked Mrs. Fearon, as she had done before, for her kindness to "a poor, friendless creature, so lonely and desolate in town, dear Mrs. Fearon, I can't tell you," she added, rapturously; "and if you are kind to me always this will be Paradise."

Denbigh Fearon heard this, and swore to himself that it should be all she wished if he had the power to make it so, which he flattered himself he had.

CHAPTER III.

The early part of December had been damp and cold, and a green Yule was predicted, but, with a suddenness that took people by surprise, ice and snow, as we have said, made their appearance. The river was frozen over, the earth locked in an icy embrace, and a cold, easterly wind reigned supreme.

This weather did not give Miss Layland many opportunities for seeing the beauties of Derbyshire. Most of the daytime was spent in the house, and she was thrown very much in contact with Mrs. Fearon, whom she endeavoured to conciliate and please in every way in her power. Her efforts were not as successful as she could wish, however, for Mrs. Fearon often said to herself, "There is something about that girl I do not like." Why she came to this conclusion she scarcely knew. Leonie was agreeable, amiable, obliging, ever ready to walk or drive out, or to sit at home, never refusing to read aloud, to sing, or to play, and her prattling conversation had always something of interest in it.

Denbigh Fearon was enraptured with her, and the passion he had conceived for her at first sight deepened day by day until it assumed such formidable proportions that he was not happy if away from her.

She told Mrs. Fearon that her father had been a doctor, and that both her parents died a few months one after the other, several years ago. She had then lived with an aunt, who also died, and since then she had given lessons in music, thanks to her good friend Mr. Sharpe, who recommended her, and got her introductions to the rich and great.

Denbigh liked to sit up late on such a night as the one preceding Christmas Day. On Christmas Eve he asked Leonie to sit up with him and sing the Advent Hymn, which she did. Mrs. Fearon had retired to rest at ten o'clock, having a bad cold, and the young people were alone together.

When Leonie had finished singing, she came and knelt down on the hearth-rug and warmed her hands, which had been chilled by the keys of the piano.

She looked so lovely that an impulse came over Denbigh Fearon which compelled him to tell his passion. His promise to his mother was forgotten. The siren had bewitched him, and he was under her spell.

"Leonie," he said, casting aside the formal "Miss Layland," which was too cold for him in his then frame of mind, "I am very happy, and hope to be more so in the future, but I want some one to share with me my happiness. I need not work. I have no ambition, and I could spend all my time and my fortune in ministering to the wants and wishes of a wife, and making a heaven on earth for her."

Leonie cast down her eyes and looked at the hearth-rug, on which she was still kneeling, as if his words had no meaning for her, though her heart beat fiercely, and her eyes flashed under the long, sheltering lashes.

"Will you be my wife, Leonie?" he went on, and his voice thrilled with an emotion which made it low and soft. "That is the question I have been longing to put to you ever since I first saw you. Do not make any trivial objection. We have known one another some weeks, and if I were to know you some years, I could not have more love, or a firmer regard for you than I have now."

"Have you told your mother of this, Denbigh?" said Leonie, looking up quickly.

"I have not, nor is it necessary that I should do so," he replied. "Am I not of the full age of twenty-

one years, and my own master? Cannot I do what I like with my fortune? I lay myself and my fortune at your feet. Rise, Leonie, dearest and well-beloved. It is I who should kneel to you, for I am a suppliant for your favour."

With a little exertion he raised and placed her in the chair he had hitherto occupied, and sank down on his knees before her, taking one of her hands in his and covering it with kisses.

"You are very young, Denbigh," exclaimed Leonie, "and I would rather you had consulted your mother before you said what you have to me, because you will reproach me and yourself for your inconsiderate haste, which you will ascribe to juvenile rashness and inexperience."

"No, indeed," he rejoined. "I am sure that I could wish to live to the age of a patriarch, and spend all my time in idolizing you. Tell me, dear Leonie, if I may hope. Let me know my fate. Will you be my darling wife?"

"I will, Denbigh," she answered, in a voice so low as to be scarcely above a whisper. "I will, and pray Heaven you may not repent your hasty decision and sudden choice!"

For some time they were too happy for words. He sat at her feet, holding her hand, and gazing into the liquid depths of her mysterious eyes, and feeling a wild joy which he had never experienced before.

They were startled from their blissful reverie by the handsome ormolu clock on the mantelpiece striking the hour of midnight. As the last cadence of the silver bell died away, a window which gave egress to the lawn was thrown open. There was a rush of air which made the lamp flicker, and gave a momentary glimpse of the snow-clad, moonlit scene outside as the curtains fell back. Then the window, which was of the Venetian kind, and opened to the ground, was closed again.

The curtain fell into its place, and all was as it was before, with the exception that the lovers were not alone.

The intruder on their privacy was a tall, handsome young man, well dressed, and wearing a fashionable overcoat. He removed an Alpine hat which he wore, and bowed politely, while with the other hand he produced a six-chambered revolver, which he took care to display conspicuously.

Denbigh Fearon rose to his feet, his face crimson with rage at being so disturbed, and at such a time, and indignant at so unceremonious an interruption and impudent intrusion upon his privacy.

Leonie sat still, but her eyes sought those of the intruder. They met, and responsive glances seemed to be exchanged between them.

"Who are you, sir?" cried Denbigh, whose voice trembled with anger he could not suppress; "and by what right do you dare to enter my house at such a time and in such a manner?"

"By no right," replied the young man, in a melodious voice. "I cannot justify my conduct, unless a want of money, which you will have to supply, be a valid excuse. Let me be a little more explicit; but, first of all, a merry Christmas to you, Mr. Fearon, and also to the fair Leonie!"

"You know this lady?" said Denbigh Fearon, whose voice faltered, as his countenance fell and the rage died out of it.

"We have met, if I am not mistaken. It was in London that I first fell in love, and it was to her that I lost my heart. Is it not so, Leonie?" was his answer.

A quick, rebuking glance flashed from her expressive eye as she answered:

"You are mistaken; we have not met. Cease to indulge your perversities at my expense. You and I are strangers to one another. I do not know you."

"So be it," returned the intruder. "I apologise for an error into which I have been led by an extraordinary accidental likeness. We are strangers. Let us return to business. My name, Mr. Fearon, is Guy Hardress, and I am a desperate man. Perhaps you would be the same if you were poor instead of rich. I have come here to-night to levy black mail upon you. You must give me what money you have in the house and a cheque upon your bankers for two thousand pounds, pledging me your honour that you will not prevent my egress from this room or throw any difficulty in the way of my obtaining the cash or the draft, or—"

He paused.

"Well!" said Denbigh Fearon, with a sarcastic smile, "what is the alternative?"

"Simply death!" answered Guy Hardress, as he called himself. "I shall give you ten minutes by your own clock for reflection, and if, at the end of that time, you defy me I shall send a bullet through

your heart, and not only yours, but through that of the lady whose marvellous likeness to some one I know will not protect her life. It is for you to choose, Mr. Fearon. My pistol is loaded, and I know how to use it as a desperate man should."

Denbigh Fearon was astounded. He knew not how to act. While he stood irresolute the moments sped with alarming rapidity. He was recalled to a sense of his danger by the gentle voice of Leonie, who said:

"Give the dreadful man what he wants. He frightens me, darling."

"So you love me, Leonie?" whispered Denbigh Fearon in her ear.

"You know, dearest, that my heart is wholly yours," she answered, looking up into his face with a loving expression.

This decided him how to act. He went to an escritoire, which he unlocked. Finding a pen and ink, he tore a draft from his cheque-book, and wrote: "Pay Mr. Guy Hardress the sum of two thousand pounds." From an inner drawer he produced a bundle of notes, which, with the cheque, he handed to the intruder, who advanced to receive them. Passing Leonie as he did so, and, bending his head, he contrived to whisper:

"In London in eight days."

She inclined her head in token of assent, but so cleverly was this by-play executed that it was lost upon Mr. Fearon.

"Thank you," said Hardress, as he received the money and the cheque, which he saw at a glance was correctly drawn; "you have now to pledge me your honour that you will not have me interfered with."

"I give you my word," answered Denbigh Fearon.

Hardress smiled and wished him and Leonie good night.

He opened the window with the same skill he had displayed in entering. The lamp flickered again. The cold wind entered the room, blowing the curtain on one side and revealing the snow-covered lawn, shimmering like silver in the moonlight. Then the window was closed. Everything resumed its wonted appearance, and Denbigh Fearon felt as if he had awokened from a hideous dream.

Leonie was by his side, however, and told him that he had saved her life.

"How can I thank you, dear?" she said, tenderly, "for saving my life? You do not regret the money, do you? What is it in comparison with my life?"

"Nothing! money is dross!" he said, impatiently. "But tell me once more, Leonie—you have no knowledge of that man?"

"None whatever! I swear it to you, Denbigh," she said.

He breathed again; but Leonie Layland had uttered a falsehood.

(To be continued.)

EDUCATION FOR INDIA:

I DESIRE to offer a few observations on the topic of education, which are occasioned by the progress of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, in his great tour in India. Foreign potentates may regard it with surprise, as unusual, that His Royal Highness should have included children's institutions as objects of inspection during his great state tour—an unusual that he should, in his position, regard any other than military institutions! In doing so, however, he will, with a wise forecast, be viewing the upbringing of his future subjects in that part of his dominions, in relation to which the cry has been raised that, for its future progress, India ought to be covered with a "network of schools." Very true; but the precautionary inquiry may be now raised, what sort of schools? for those which fail so largely here in the training required for the body as well as the mind will, unless care be taken, be worse failures there.

At home, however, in the distinguished review we had of the drill of the children of the half-time schools, His Royal Highness saw much of the results obtainable by a correct course of mixed physical, mental and industrial training and of sanitation in the conversion of the former lowest classes of soiled Arabs of our streets, living by depredation and spoil, or mendicancy, into law-abiding, orderly subjects, living by productive industry.

In that review His Royal Highness had proof before him how rugged natures of every race and clime, who are hardened and past cure in the adult stages, may in youth be ameliorated and modified to beneficial ends.

At Calcutta His Royal Highness may have an opportunity which (under the guidance of his sanitary monitor, Dr. Fayer) it is to be hoped, will not be lost, of inspecting a children's institution, fraught

with large portents, namely, an institution of an orphan asylum of female children of British parents.

The horribly heavy death-rates amongst children of British parents in India has led to the very general conclusion that children of the British race cannot be reared or have succession in those climates. But the experience of that one institution of female children, as stated in the discussion to which I refer, would go to reverse that conclusion, for it shows that such heavy children's death-rates are really factitious and preventable, as from other evidence I believe them to be.

It was proved that by sanitation in Calcutta, which has a climate of an inferior order, the death rate of female children is reduced to nearly one-half the death-rate of children of the same ages of all classes in London. When it is considered what has been done by sanitation in the adult stages in India, where the death-rate, which was once upwards of sixty per thousand, has been reduced to thirteen and a half, or less than it was in the line regiments at home—that in India the death-rates of the much-exposed class, the railway engine drivers, are not more than ten in a thousand, i.e., not more than weather-exposed classes in this metropolis, when it is considered what is already done in these adult stages in India, there is little doubt that if the children reared in the Calcutta institution were removed to the hill stations or to stations moderately salubrious the British race might be reared and have succession.

Dr. Fayer has attested, from his own observation, the results of sanitation in that particular institution in Calcutta. He states that he had seen British children of a third generation in India; nevertheless he would not go so far as to say whether the British race might have succession there. Certainly not, I should say, if they were to be located in malarious places, or places not rendered habitable by sanitation. But I would urge it that it is of importance for the object that the training in any network of schools called for there, and peculiarly so for British children, should be physical as well as mental, of the type of such special institutions as those of which the Prince saw some of the outcome at our school drill review. But wheresoever it be thought fit the physical training may be imparted without the military element.

It is to be taken into account that the principles of the reformed mental, and physical, and industrial training we advocate here is a reform highly important for our colonies, where our trained teachers go, and where our educational institutions are commonly too literally copied.

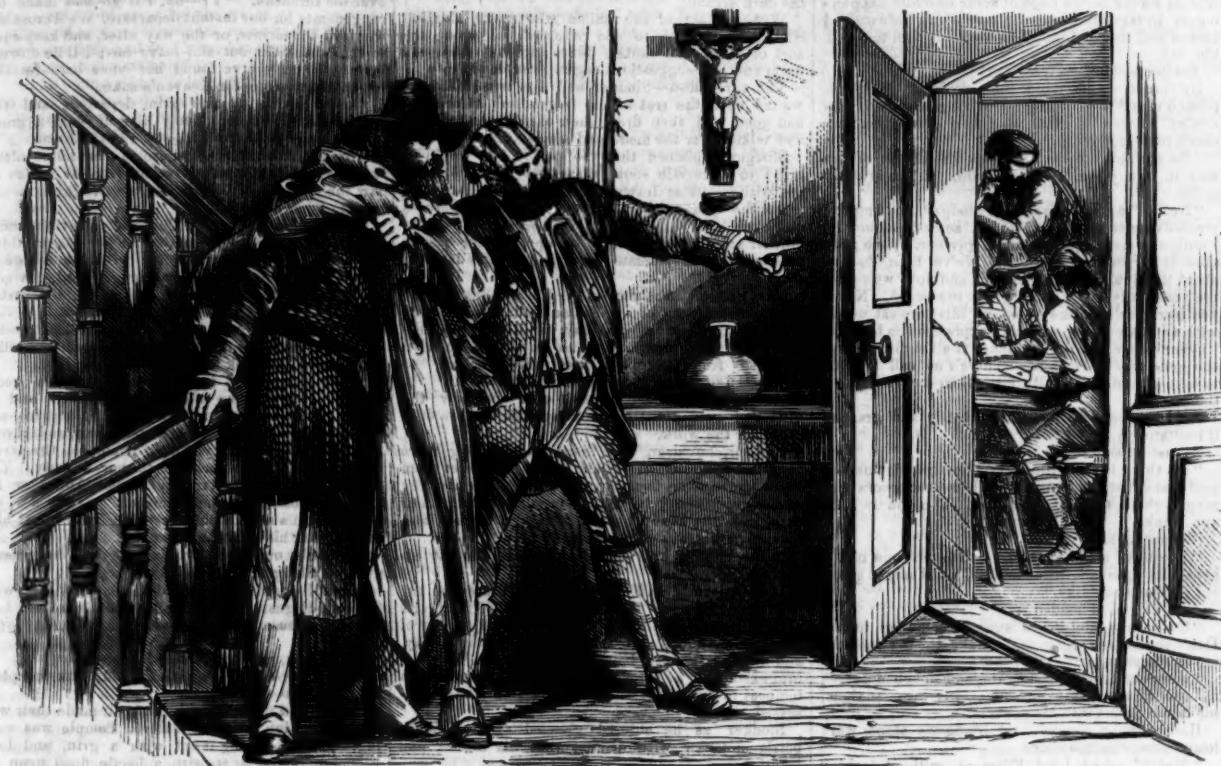
It were unnecessary to observe here that efforts for the amelioration of semi-barbarous populations must, as a rule, be of inferior effect to those applied in the infantile stages of life.

E. C.

MR. MOTLEY, the historian, has been residing at Boston lately, but he is about to return to this country in order to resume his literary labours.

WITH a view to ensure the general adoption of the new spelling of Indian proper names, an amalgamated alphabetical index has, it is stated, been prepared, and copies will be extensively circulated in official and non-official circles.

THE FLOODS.—Beyond all doubt 1875 will deserve a place in history as a year of floods and inundations. From January last a week has hardly passed without some serious news of damage caused by the waters, and after numerous places on the Continent, after Nottingham, Derby, and a hundred other towns had suffered, the turn recently came for London. Two high tides in succession have caused almost incalculable damage along the course of the river from Woolwich to Richmond, a distance of nearly twenty miles. Wharves have been flooded, docks overflown; small tenements have been not exactly washed away, but, as far as their lower storeys are concerned, submerged. It seems that the antiquarians have to go a long way back to discover a similar state of the Thames to that which it has been recently suffering from. One of these learned individuals has got, after great search, a kindred case, but he had to hunt to 1270 for it. The record is in Allen's "History of London," published by Cowie and Strange. The following are the terms in which that flood is alluded to:—"In this year there fell such prodigious rains that the Thames overflowed and broke down its banks in many places, which occasioned an immense damage, and the fruits of the earth were thereby so destroyed as to occasion the most excessive dearth that had ever been known in this kingdom, what being sold at six pounds eight shilling the quarter" (which more than sixty pounds of our present money) "and the famine reigned in so horrible and destructive a manner that many poor parents ate the own children." This rare book is in the Guildhall Library.



[THE INSTRUMENTS OF CRIME.]

HE LOVES ME : HE LOVES ME NOT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Maurice Durand," "Fickle Fortune," "The Gipsy
Peer," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXX.

Mischief, thou art afoot,
Take thou what course thou wilt.

Shakespeare.

THE second gondola which had started in pursuit of the signora, after a short and ineffectual attempt to follow her, turned back down a sharp bend of the canal. The well-cloaked figure leapt out, and, after a few angry exclamations, partly in English and partly in Italian, walked swiftly away.

After traversing a hundred yards it stopped before a dimly lighted window and struck the glass thrice.

A door opened and the figure entered.

"Well, guv'nor?" asked the individual who had opened the door, in an eager voice.

For answer, Lord Ellsmere—for it was he—muttered impatiently, and pushing past Slodger, who had followed his master into foreign parts, ascended the well-worn stairs and entered an upstairs room.

Here he flung his cloak and hat from him, and, as a first step towards recovering his equanimity, reached a bottle of brandy from a shelf.

Filling a glass, he tossed it down his throat and dropped into a chair.

"Given me the slip again," he muttered. "Was there ever such luck? To think that I have followed her from city to city without knowing it! And now, just at the moment of recognition, to lose her. I wouldn't care if it were in London. I could track her there from east to west. But here, in this horrid place, half water and half land, with no one but jabbering idiots about, who don't understand half I say it's maddening!"

Here he refilled his glass, and sipped the fiery liquid thoughtfully.

"It was her, I'll be sworn. I could scarcely believe my eyes at first; but I'm not deceived. It was her, if she hasn't a twin sister—and she hasn't that. It was her, and she's here almost within my grasp. And now the thing is to find out where she is hidden. To-morrow she may have bolted again, and there will be all the chase over again. What shall I do? If I make inquiries openly, I shall excite suspicion; may

run against some of the English here too, and I don't want to do that. If I'm not mistaken I saw that idiot Howard this afternoon. Lucky I had the cloak on, or he'd have seen me. He's just the fellow to spot a man when he didn't want to be seen. I'll get that rascal of mine up and see if he can be of any use."

So resolved, he knocked upon the floor with his foot, and presently the door opened and Slodger entered.

His arm was out of its sling now, but his appearance had not improved by his trip to Italy. Like his master, he had grown a beard, and his villainous countenance looked more ill-favoured than ever with that hirsute appendage.

In his eyes too, bloodshot with drink, there lurked a dangerous, sullen light, which proclaimed the bravado, ready to play any evil game which chance might send him.

Chance for him took the form of Lord Ellsmere, who had, in compliance with Slodger's earnest entreaties, brought him here to help hunt down Lady Florice, or Valeria Temple, as we must still call her.

Now, as he stood, with his hand upon the table, stooping forward, awaiting Lord Ellsmere's commands, his vicious presence seemed to suggest an idea to the earl.

"Well, Slodger," he said, after a moment devoted to a consideration of the startling idea, "we've had some luck at last; but I don't know whether it's bad or good—who is downstairs?" he broke off to ask. "I heard voices talking."

Slodger jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Only runnins, guv'nor," he replied, hoarsely. "Italians, all on 'em, and the right sort too," he added, with a chuckle. "We've been a playin' dominoes, which is the game they're familiar with; not as dominoes ain't as good as any other when you're sharp, and can stow a double-six up your sleeve. The trick ain't easy passed on these chaps downstairs, howsoever; they're too wide awake, and had a little difference o' opinion with his mate, whip out one of them long skewers of theirs in a jiffy," and the ruffian grinned knowingly.

Lord Ellsmere eyed him thoughtfully. The idea was growing into shape, and he was getting familiar with its desperate nature.

"But you was sayin' you'd had some luck, guv'nor," said Slodger.

"Yes," replied Lord Ellsmere, "I have discovered one of the persons we want—hit upon her by chance too."

"Oh! it's the young lady, is it?" said Slodger with evident disappointment. "I'd hoped it might be that varmint as give me the lump o' lead. But I can bide my time, guv'nor; I'm no ways impatient, for when we runs him down I'll pay him my score, I warrant."

Then, as Lord Ellsmere seemed lost in thought the ruffian bent across the table and whispered, huskily :

"I say, guv'nor, if we did come across him here, how easy it 'ud be to pay him off in a right-down style! This 'ere place is in the very spot for a job of this sort. There needn't be no trouble with the body. Just wait for him behind one o' these 'ere corners, and stick him in the back, and then pitch him in the canal. Who'd be the wiser? This 'ere's a capital place for a job o' that sort, an' if you don't like the work, you can let it out. Why, there ain't one o' the genuine downstairas as would be above a little neat employment o' that sort. And they don't make no fuss neither! They carries the implements o' their trade under them long, black, seedy cloaks o' theirs all nice and handy!"

Lord Ellsmere rose, and paced to and fro, greatly agitated by the suggestion which his low, vulgar tool had put into plain language. What stood between him and the great estate which he felt in the ordinary course of things should have been his?

Nothing but a woman, a romantic, helpless girl—doubly helpless now that she was alone in a foreign city, which offered so many opportunities for the successful commission of a crime.

What was to prevent him acting on the hint which his own evil heart and his tool's desperate nature had suggested? Nothing.

Let him devise some scheme to lure the beautiful girl into a dark court on the border of the canal, and there let the assassin's dagger dart upon its prey.

Once the deed was done, he could make all haste to England. There was no one—excepting the ruffian at his elbow—who knew of his visit to Venice; there would be nothing to point suspicion towards him. Why should he not do the deed, and so rid himself of the barrier betwixt him and fortune?

Here, close at his hand, were the means of cutting the Gordian knot and unravelling the tangled skein.

As he walked up and down, with the ferocity of a tiger and the cowardice of a wolf, his avarice pulling him one way, his fears the other, the ruffian leaned an elbow on the table and watched him with an expression upon his face as if he understood the workings of his master's mind.

"What is the best thing to do?" muttered Lord

Ellsmere. To follow out his mystery and play her against Raven in the hope of some mischief happening, or to take the desperate step which his own bad nature and the instinct of his ruffianly tool tempted him to?

Avarice prevailed.

He turned to the table, and, draining his glass, pushed it and the bottle towards his companion, who availed himself of the unspoken in vivation with characteristic alacrity.

"So you think it easy to make friend out of the way in this place, eh?" he said, with a ghastly smile.

"Nothin' easier," responded Slodger, nodding appreciatively as he drew his hand across his mouth, "nothin' easier. Be persuaded, guv'nor, by me; it's all the better to play straight. We've been dodgin' about these furin' parts too long, and now we've got the younglaid, why, stral'ghit's the word. Never you fear, guv'nor," he added, as Ellsmere sat down, with an anxious, apprehensive expression on his face, "never you fear. We'll manage it all right, me and the gentlemen downstairs. There's no call for you to take a hand in it stall; leave it to me, and done's the word."

Lord Ellsmere reached for the bottle and grasped it hesitatingly.

At last he said:

"I'll think it over, Slodger. You get downstairs again, and manage to find out where the signora who sang at the opera to-night lodges. Can you do it, do you think?"

Slodger nodded.

"I thinks I can," he said. "There's one o' the gentlemen speaks a little English, and I might get it out o' him causal like."

Lord Ellsmere nodded.

"Go on then, and if you succeed come up to me. Don't come directly, or you'll make them suspicious— you understand?"

The ready tool nodded again, and slouched out.

Lord Ellsmere sat motionless, his face anxious, his hands thrust into his pockets.

Half an hour elapsed, and Slodger's steps were heard ascending the stairs.

"Well?" asked Lord Ellsmere, without looking round.

"All right, guv'nor, I've got it. Here it is, writ down on this 'ere piece o' paper."

And he laid a slip of paper upon the table.

Lord Ellsmere took it up with a trembling hand.

"Fetch me my note-case," he said, and Slodger obediently reached a despatch-box from a portmanteau in the corner.

"Now, while I write this letter," said Lord Ellsmere, "go down and sound them. You're sure they are the right sort?"

"Come and have a look at them," said Slodger, with a grin. "I've seen 'em draw their daggers and skewers twice this evening, and I knows they'd listen kindly to anything o' the sort. You can see 'em through a chink in the door, and reckon them up for yourself, guv'nor."

Lord Ellsmere motioned towards the door, and Slodger going out on tiptoe, he followed him.

Descending the stairs, Slodger paused at the bottom and pointed to a half-door, through which a broad stream of light forced its way.

Breathlessly Lord Ellsmere stooped down and scanned the occupants of the room.

A glance showed him that Slodger had formed no mistaken estimate of their character.

They were of that numerous class of footpads with which Venice is infested, men who would play the part of assassins for a napoleon, and think no more of their errand than if it were the discharge of the most innocent and legitimate duty.

With a nod of satisfaction Lord Ellsmere re-ascended to the room, and, after closing the door, gave his directions.

Slodger was to go down again and sound them carefully, picking out two of the most desperate and hinting at the nature of the task which they were to undertake, of course taking the Italian who spoke English as one of them. If necessary Slodger was to give them a sight of the gold.

"If they are curions—and I don't think they can fail to be—mention your mistress. Say something about a love affair. They'll understand that. There was an evil-looking ruffian near the fireplace—try him; but be careful, and don't go farther than is safe. If you find they don't answer as well as you expected, stop at once and let it drop. Turn it off as if it was a joke, you understand?"

"I understand," said Slodger, huskily, dropping the money which his master had handed him into his pocket. "Trust it to me, guv'nor. I ain't going to risk my own neck, never fear. And if it's all straight, what then?"

"Let the two wait until I give them the word. Mind, no names!"

With another emphatic nod Slodger departed on his dark errand.

With the aid of the Italian who spoke English Slodger explained to one other of the group the sort of work he wanted done, and he found his hints and half-suggestions eagerly responded to.

The three men—Slodger and the two Italians—waited until the rest of the frequenters of the inn had gone, and then drew their chairs near together and talked over the meditated assassination.

Slodger explained that the person who would be lured to a certain spot where they waited to await her with stilettos drawn was a lady—an Austrian.

At the word "Austrian" the Italian's energies redoubled; it was a grand deed in their eyes to murder an Austrian, it would be a proud and charitable work to assassinate the whole of the detested race.

She was an Austrian lady, Slodger said, who stood in the way of an Italian rouser. It was entirely an affair of jealousy, and the lady, his mistress, who was anxious to have the Austrian removed from her path was quite willing to pay well those who should do her the service.

At that point Slodger took care to show the glitter of gold and the two desperados were both eager for the work.

Slodger, however, told them that nothing more could be done that night, and, promising to let them know during the day, for messin' broke while they were negotiating, he left them, first taking their oath, upon the handle of one of their stilettos, and drinking a libation of red wine.

Then Slodger was satisfied, and returned to his master.

Lord Ellsmere had endured the tortures of the condemned during the short time of Slodger's absence; fear and doubt of the wisdom and safety of the bold and desperate game he was about to play, and dread lest even before he could put his plan into execution he should be betrayed, raised such a tempest in his heart that he was like a man possessed.

Slodger as he entered glanced at the brandy bottle and saw with disgust that his master had emptied it.

"Well?" exclaimed Lord Ellsmere. "What do they say—what have you done? You haven't gone too far—you haven't run my neck into a halter!"

Slodger grinned.

"Too far, you said. I think too much o' my own precious neck to do that. Don't you take on, it's all right. They're game boys—ratlin' good-hearted chaps as ever I see, and the trick's as good as done! I've chose two on 'em; one the chap as spoke English, and the other a dark-looking chap with an ugly grin. They're agreed to do the job for twenty pun', and I can't say as it's dear. It's cheaper than you'd get it worked off in England. They're agoin' to wait until I gives them the word, and then—why, it's all up for the young lady!"

"But—but," said Lord Ellsmere, "are you sure it is all safe—have you kept all names quiet? Do they suspect anything?"

"Nothin'," said Slodger, "and between you and me, guv'nor, I don't think it will matter much if they did. They enjoys a game like this 'ere just for the fun of the thing—but when it comes to being paid for it, why, it's quite charmin' how smiling and ready they are. No, I planted that Austrian dodge into 'em, and they swallows it quite kindly like—they hates an Austrian like poison. It's all right, guv'nor; only get the young lady to meet us at some convenient corner and she'll have no more unhappiness in this 'ere wicked world."

"Hold your tongue," said Lord Ellsmere, peering round the room as if he feared the very walls might have ears.

"There's still work to do. I don't know where she is. Perdition seize this place! If she were only down in London, Slodger, you must find out to-morrow where she has hidden. You know the opera house?"

Slodger nodded.

"Go there and hang about until she comes; she must be there to-morrow—no, to-day, that's the sun, isn't it, not the moon? She must go there to see the manager. Wait for her, and then follow her home. Mind! to-day is our last chance. She will be off to-morrow, and then there will be another wild-goose chase. Now, if I could only feel that it was all safe," and he clenched his hands and fell to pacing up and down the room.

Slodger eyed him with mingled amusement and contempt.

"That's where it is with these fine gentlemen," he muttered, grumbly. "They're all right enough up to the point; but when it comes to that they're as white-livered as a canary bird."

Then, aloud, he said:

"And you, guv'nor, what are you going to do?"

"I?" said Lord Ellsmere, passing his hot hand over his forehead. "I?—oh, I'll go and make arrangements for our instant departure. We'll cross the Channel to-morrow, or the day after, and keep snug in England. Get out and leave me; I'll lie down a little. When you've found her come here for the letter. There, go, for Heaven's sake!"

Slodger, with another grin, departed, and the valiant Lord Ellsmere flung himself with a groan upon a rickety couch which stood in the room.

The entrance of Slodger some few hours afterwards woke him from a feverish sleep, in which he saw the tall form of Valeria Temple struggling in the bands of her assassin.

"Ah!" said Slodger. "This yer's the right thing to do, guv'nor. Sleep's the tonic to put anything like spirit into a man. Forty winks and a go o' brandy keeps a man's pluck a-going. Well, guv'nor, it's all right again. I've found her nest, the pretty deer."

Lord Ellsmere, who was little refreshed by his sleep, but rendered more desperate the hours rolled on, snuffed, and took shelter from the pocket.

"You have found it?" he said. "That's good, Slodger; you'll make a capital detective," and he smiled. "Now then for the note. Take it in—say three, four times—just as it goes dark, and give it into her own hands, if you can; if not, tell the porter at the house that it must go to her directly. You can make him understand by signs. And now I'll go have a look at the house myself."

And with a shoulder he threw his cloak round him and crossed his feet on his head.

"There's one thing, guv'nor, we've forgotten," growled Slodger, "and that's the grub."

"Grub!—pah!" exclaimed Lord Ellsmere, with a fierce disgust. "You can eat when you like; take me to the house first, and then go back and get your dinner."

"And you, guv'nor?" said Slodger.

"I don't want any dinner. I could drift this place dry; but no—pah!"

Enwrapped in their cloaks the pair made their way to the quiet inn at which Valeria Temple was staying, Slodger pointing it out with a grin, and Lord Ellsmere looking at it with a hectic flush upon his cheeks and a savage light in his eyes.

"The last roof that will cover that mad cousin of mine!" he muttered, grimly, as he turned away.

"Now you can go to your dinner. I shall return in an hour and tell you where to watch for her."

Slodger nodded and slouched off back to their inn, and Lord Ellsmere hurried to the booking-office to book seats in the diligence for two.

Before we can return to Valeria herself we must follow the other gondola which contained Edgar Raven.

His feelings on recognizing Valeria Temple as the prima donna were as intense as though so vastly different to those of Lord Ellsmere.

A tempest, wild and awful in its magnitude, thrilled in his breast.

The woman he loved was here in Venice, so close that he could be at her feet in five minutes!

It was a fact full of intense pleasure and intense pain.

It was true that he could be at her feet if he dared to break through the spell and once more seek her presence; but that he could not do.

Her own words, those bitter, sweet words spoken in the quiet room at Kensington had separated them for ever, and Edgar Raven had neither the presumption nor the lack of knightly honour to intrude upon the woman who had told him that her heart and hand could never be his.

Motionless as a statue his gondolier waited for his orders.

Edgar stood with his arms folded, gazing at the house which contained all the world held dear for him, lost in a maze of thought and a passion of longing.

At last he dropped down into his old position, and uttered the one word:

"Home?"

With a "Si, signor," the gondolier turned the boat and sped through the darkness.

"Oh, that I could be a servant to be near her, to protect her," murmured Edgar Raven, with a wild longing and indescribable presentiment of coming ill.

"It maddens me when I reflect that she has no arm near her to protect her and shield her from danger. This world is huge and wicked and terrible for the weak—who knows it better than I?—and she, a woman, is weak and alone in it! How her voice moved me! Did I ever think I could love like this? I laughed at love at one time, love now laughs at me. We meet in Venice! she is here in the city which has cast a spell over my life. 'Twas here my father loved, 'twas here I was born, 'twas here I met her for whom I would willingly die, if by so doing I could give her an hour's pleasure."

With his head lowered, and his face white with his emotion, he ascended the stairs.

The old woman, Francesca, came out of her room to receive him, and shook her head and shrugged her shoulders as she muttered :

"The young signor is full of thought; opera or no opera makes no difference."

Edgar passed into his room, and with an abstracted "good night" to the kind old creature relaxed into reflection.

From that reflection sprang a determination as noble as it was disinterested.

Rising at last from the chair in which he had dropped on first entering the room, he exclaimed :

"No, she has bidden me give up all hopes of winning her and I will obey, but though I cannot have her love I can guard her life, and I will do so. Unseen and unknown of her I will make it my life's duty to watch over her. My arm shall ever be ready to protect and guard her. Sweet Valeria! you are no longer alone, for I am near you!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN the first shock which the announcement of the old servant that she was in her father's house caused had passed Valeria's spirit was lulled and soothed by a peculiar feeling.

Since her mother's death she had devoted herself to the prosecution of a task which had seemed impossible of accomplishment. Her life had been wrapped in a dreamy uncertainty and restlessness, without an indication of a successful result.

Now suddenly the clouds seemed to lift and a ray of sunshine crept through, or rather they thickened and a finger-point of lightning pierced them and indicated an issue to all the past months of restless travel and search.

She was in her father's house. Here he had plotted the device which had won him her mother and wrecked her life. Here, perhaps beneath the window at which she knelt, had walked that false lover upon whom or his offspring she had sworn vengeance.

Who was he? Did he or any of his still live?

As she asked herself the question something within her with a sudden, fearful emphasis, answered: "An object of your vengeance still lives, and you are near him!"

She rose, pale and agitated, for at that moment she had seen dimly shadowed in the darkness a figure, wrapped in a concealing cloak, standing in a gondola, with arms folded and eyes fixed upon the window at which she stood.

It was the figure of Edgar Raven.

While she strained her vision to ascertain who it might be the gondola turned and the figure vanished.

In the morning she rose with a vivid idea of some coming event which would still further clear up the mystery enshrouding the past.

With pale face and a light in the dark, sweet eyes which they always wore when the shadow of her life fell upon her, she entered the breakfast-room, where Madame Leclare already awaited her.

Her first words were :

"Will you send to the opera house this morning?

I do not think I shall leave home."

Madame Leclare looked up as she poured out the chocolate and remonstrated tenderly.

"Do you think that is wise, dear? You look so pale and dispirited this morning. A walk and some fresh air would do you good. Let me persuade you to come with me."

"As you like," said Valeria, absently, always ready to yield to the woman who had proved so good a friend; "as you will. It will be better for me, I dare say; I did not sleep much last night, and I am glad I do not sing to-night."

"The manager has been here this morning already," said Madame Leclare, "and he almost went on his knees to me, imploring that you would sing to-night, if for the last time, and offering any sum you liked to mention."

Valeria shook her head.

"No, I will not sing to-night."

Madame Leclare did not press the request, and Valeria finished her pretence at breakfasting by rising and walking to the harp.

After a few chords she said, suddenly :

"Shall we go out?"

Madame Leclare was ready in five minutes, and, almost masked by their veils, they called for a gondola and left the house.

With feelings of mingled admiration and dread Valeria looked round her upon the scene so marvelously strange—it's very romance heightened by the revelations which it held for her.

At every street she asked herself :

"Was it here that my mother walked? was it here that the false one lived?"

They reached the opera house and transacted the business which Valeria had with the manager.

As they passed out again, to go to the gondola, Valeria forgot to lower her veil.

A man standing in the shadow of one of the stone pillars scanned her face and walked off in another direction.

It was Slodger.

"Where shall we go now?" asked Madame Leclare, who was charmed with the novel aspect of the magic city, and hoped to draw Valeria from her abstraction.

"Anywhere," answered Valeria, sinking into the cushions, and drawing the curtain so that she could observe without being observed. "Anywhere: it is like dreamland. Venice! Venice!"

The gondolier, receiving his instructions, sent the frail barge swiftly on, but not so swiftly but that another kept always in the wake.

The curtains of the second one were closed, and behind them was Edgar Raven.

Madame Leclare talked during the ride. Valeria listened, smiling softly sometimes at the kind-hearted friend's efforts to rouse her, at others looking out with dreamy eyes, deaf to Madame Leclare's voice and living only in the past.

At last they returned home, and on the steps they saw the old man who had remembered Sir Robert.

Valeria hesitated a moment, as he gave them the salutation, and said :

"Will you go up to the rooms, dear? I think I will stay here a little while and talk to this old man."

Madame Leclare passed on, saying that she would inquire about the dinner, and Valeria, setting herself on one of the rotting stone steps, said :

"And so you remember Lord Robert Ellsmere?"

"Yes, signora," he replied. "I remember Lord Robert, though it's so many years ago; but then I cannot remember the things of yesterday. Yes, I remember Lord Robert."

"And—" said Valeria, softly, as her face paled, "do you remember his lady, signor?"

"That is certain also," said the old man, stretching out his wrinkled hands, in one of which was a gondola ear. "That is certain: she was English, signora, and very beautiful, one of Raphael's Madonnas we used to call, her and yet with a fire in her eyes. Ah! she was beautiful. Signora, your pardon, but your face has a likeness to the Lady Ellsmere!"

Valeria smiled and shook her head.

"That is a compliment," she said, trying to speak carelessly. "And the Lord Ellsmere—had he any friends whom you remember?"

"It is certain that he had many friends; gold brings them, signora, and Lord Robert had much gold. Yes, he had many friends, but then faces do not linger in my mind, and their names, signora, have vanished."

"Do you remember any of the friends of the Lady Ellsmere?" asked Valeria, faintly.

The old man leaned upon his long oar and considered.

"Signora, I do not remember. There was some one, English also, whose face I see plainly. He was blessed with a fair countenance, signora, and they said—the idle gossip—that the Lady Ellsmere looked on him with the eyes of love, but it could not be true, seeing, signora, that she wedded the Lord Robert."

Valeria's heart beat fast.

Could the handsome man of whom the old gondolier spoke be the man who had wrecked her mother's life—the false friend and lover?

"Try to remember, signor," she said, tremulously, her eyes bent eagerly on the old man's paled face.

"Try to remember, I implore of you. I—I knew Lord Robert, and I am anxious for any tidings."

"I see," said the old man, with outstretched hand. "I see, signora, and I would cudgel these old brains. Ah, one thing strikes me; the friend of whom I spoke was married soon after the Lady Ellsmere. I do remember the festival at the church yonder. What was his name? No, lady, I forgot everything, I am very old. All I remember is that upon his gondola there was carved a crest and the letter E."

At this moment, while Valeria was wrapped in attention and trembling upon the brink of the path to a discovery, a gondola swept slowly past and a hand stirred its curtains.

"See, signora!" exclaimed the old man, with sudden interest. "There is the good and great painter! Ah, may the kind Heaven preserve thee, good heart."

Valeria rose, and, despairing of obtaining any further memories from the old man, ascended the stairs.

The day grew, and the sun was near his setting. Valeria had spent the time musing, at intervals, turning to her harp to play the dark thoughts from her mind.

The sun set, and with his last rays gilded the figure of the old porter as he stood, with his hand to his eyes, on the steps of the palace.

"Another day the saints have spared us," he muttered as he turned.

A hand was laid on his arm, and a voice, hoarse and disguised, said:

"Signor Porter, this for the fair lady your guest. See that only her hands touch it."

Then, before the old man could gather an idea of the voice or form of the messenger, the cloaked figure thrust a sealed letter into his hand and dropped into a gondola, which instantly sped into the dim twilight.

"A love missive for a certainty," said the old man, as he bore it to Valeria's apartments. "This from a messenger, signora," he said, placing the letter in her hands.

"Not for me?" said Valeria, starting and half rising from her seat near the balcony.

"For the fair lady your guest," said the messenger, and there is no other fair one in the house, signora," and he left the room.

Valeria took the letter to the lamp, and with a curious glance scanned its superscription.

"To the signora."

That was all.

"It cannot be for me," she murmured. "It is for some member of the household; the old man must take it and learn for whom it is intended," and she walked towards the door.

Half way, however, she paused, and with the letter in her hand returned to the balcony.

She looked again at the direction.

The handwriting was English—but was it indeed meant for her? From whom did it come?

With a quick gesture she put an end to the mental discussion by opening the envelope.

It contained a small sheet of paper upon which were written these words :

"SIGNORA.—The writer of these words is in possession of the secret for which you thirst. He will communicate that knowledge if you have courage to meet him alone to-night at the hour of ten on the left side of the Bridge of Sighs. Remember your oath, and have no fear of—

"ONE WHO WISHES YOU WELL."

Valeria read this strange epistle twice, thrice, and stood for the space of one minute gazing at the lamp.

In that time she had arrived at a decision.

She would go.

She would meet this anonymous well-wisher and learn all that he could tell her. Not for nothing had the presentiment of a coming clue to the secret possessed her.

She would go, and alone. Who dared doubt the courage of an Ellsmere?

She glanced at the clock, the hands pointed to the hour of eight.

An hour and a half she waited with outward calm, but with inward fever, then, leaving word for Madame Leclare, who had gone to the opera, that she should return shortly, she wrapped her large cloak about her, fastened her mask over her face, and slipped down the stairs with noiseless feet.

The old porter came out of his nook in the hall to receive her commands.

"A gondola," she said. "I am going to the Bridge of Sighs."

"Signora will not need a gondola," he answered. "The boat to cross the river here and walk hundred yards. If signora pleases I will row her across."

Valeria murmured a hurried assent, and the old man slowly unfastened one of several boats attached to the steps and assisted her to enter.

When she alighted on the other side he asked if he should await her return.

"No," she replied. "I will call to you when I return."

Then, after waiting until the old man had recrossed, she sped with noiseless, eager feet towards the grim rendezvous.

There was no fear nor the shadow of dread in her bosom, only a dreadful absorbing desire to obtain some tangible clue to the mystery. To gain her end and accomplish her oath she would have gone through any peril, any suffering; for her the darkness, broken only as it was by the occasional glimmer of a dim lamp, had no terrors; all other considerations were absorbed by the desire to learn anything, however insignificant, of the man of whom she was in search.

Before her loomed the fatal bridge, and with panting heart, for she had walked fast, with resolute, fearless spirit, she looked eagerly round for some signs of her anonymous correspondent.

All was still and silent. A few moments passed as she stood in the shadow of the bridge waiting for the hour of appointment to come from the steeped belfreys which reared their graceful heads against the darkening sky.

A gondola swept slowly by and passed out of sight by a curve in the river.

The minutes fled on, and suddenly the hour chimed from a church above her head.

With a thrill at her heart she stepped out of the shadow into the light thrown by a lamp across the path.

As she did so two cloaked figures sprang from the doorway by an old palace, and, rushing upon her, threw a cloak with fearful clutch round her head and face.

Not a sound had risen to break the silence.

Helpless, unable to raise her voice—that voice which moved thousands to enthusiasm—Valeria Temple was in the toils!

(To be continued.)

BURIED SECRETS.

CHAPTER XL.

IT is safe to say that neither Sir Hugh Redmond nor his young wife closed their eyes in sleep during the remainder of the night, after the baronet's encounter with Dalyell, and their subsequent stirring interview with each other.

They presented themselves at the breakfast-table the next morning, in careful toilets, he coldly courteous, she quiet and calm, with a self-command that amazed him.

Sir Hugh had bandaged his bruised temple with cloths wrung in cold water, and there was no disfigurement perceptible. The slight discolouration that resulted from Dalyell's blow was hidden by a loose-falling lock of fair hair.

After breakfast, and an examination of the morning post, Sir Hugh invited Diana to drive with him.

She accepted the invitation promptly. She comprehended that he desired to talk with her concerning his project of inviting guests to the Hall, and that he could do so with more freedom out of doors than in the house.

Naturally, some embarrassment would attach to their first private interview after that one of the previous night, and that embarrassment could be best gotten over in the open air, amid the distractions of out-door life.

Sir Hugh ordered Lady Redmond's pony-phaeton and she retired to dress.

When the vehicle was brought round Diana appeared, attired in a costume of dark blue velvet, and Lady Redmond took up the reins.

"Shall we take the road to Oxford?" she inquired.

"If you choose," he answered. "I have excused your groom from attendance. We will take a long drive, in any direction you may prefer."

They drove down the stately avenue, turning into the park, and later into the highway.

"I wish to talk to you, Diana, about the guests we shall invite to visit us," said Sir Hugh, after a long silence. "I have been little in society, you know. You have received and paid visits to all the ladies I know in the county. Are there any among them whom you would like to invite at the Hall?"

"Not one," answered Diana. "I like them all, but I feel scarcely equal to the exertion of entertaining them."

"Have you any personal friends, any schoolfellow whom you would like to ask?"

"No. I shall be quite content if you will permit me to ask Miss Edgely and papa," said Diana, keeping her eyes fixed upon her horses. "Miss Edgely can help entertain the other guests, and I know that she and papa will be delighted to visit us."

"We will write to them to-day. Is there no one else for whose society you have a preference?"

"No one. I should like you to invite gentlemen, Sir Hugh, if you are willing. They are less exacting and easier to entertain," said Diana, secretly anxious that the baronet should have congenial company.

Sir Hugh sighed.

"There is Captain Gordon of the Blues; but I fancy I heard he had gone to the Mediterranean," said the baronet. "Other friends have other engagements. I would prefer to ask people who will not study us too closely, Diana. Our relations to each other must not be commented upon."

He became thoughtful, canvassing in his own mind the merits of old friends and their suitability as guests of Lady Redmond.

Suddenly Diana uttered an exclamation. An open carriage, drawn by four horses, with footmen and outriders, was approaching them from the direction of Oxford.

Three gentlemen occupied the vehicle. Two of them were of ordinary appearance, differing in no respect from the typical English gentleman.

The third was Lord Thorncombe.

Diana recognized him at first glance as the

gentleman she had noticed months before in Rotten Row, Hyde Park, and whose stare at her upon that occasion had made such an impression upon her.

He recognized her now also, and regarded her with the same stare. His grand old face, with its beetling white brows and white moustache, kindled and flushed, and Diana's pure and tender countenance, with its wonderful beauty, flushed as in reflection of his.

Recollecting himself, the earl withdrew his gaze from Diana and glanced at Sir Hugh, who raised his hat. With a smile the old earl returned the salutation, and the vehicles were swept apart, each proceeding in its different direction.

"Who was that old gentleman, Sir Hugh?" asked Diana, eagerly.

"The one who stared at you so? He is the Earl of Thorncombe. I supposed, from the looks you interchanged, that you were acquainted with him."

"I never saw him but once before, and that was last summer, in Hyde Park. We met then as we have met just now. We exchanged looks and passed on. I never knew who he was. Is he not a nobility-looking man? Something in his face, or look, perhaps, went straight to my heart."

"He seems to have made an impression upon you, Diana, as you upon him. The earl is a very old friend of my family. His eldest son, Justus, and my father were very intimate at Eton and Oxford."

"Has he many children?"

"Not one living. Justus, his eldest son, a man of brilliant intellect, died unmarried. Alfred, his second son, a man of society, married early, lost his entire family, and died, leaving no heir. The third son, George, was the father's favourite. I have heard my father speak of him. George Berwyn had no ambition, and did not care for society. But he was a gentleman to the core, noble, true-hearted, generous and kindly—a man of a thousand. He had his faults, however, and got into a wild set in London, and caused his father a great deal of anxiety. And, to crown all, he married a music-teacher, I believe, and his father disowned him. He went to Australia and died there."

"Did the wife die too?"

"She died very soon after her husband, if I remember rightly. You seem interested in Lord Thorncombe's history, Diana."

"Because his face interests me, I suppose. I was never before so interested in any one at sight. Has Lord Thorncombe no living descendant, Sir Hugh? Did his youngest son leave no heir?"

"I think not. I never heard of one. I have understood that the earl has adopted, or intended to adopt, as his son and heir, a relative of the late countess, a young gentleman named Dalyell. Dalyell is generally regarded as Lord Thorncombe's heir presumptive, the earl having the right to bequeath his entire property, estates and all."

"I should like to meet Lord Thorncombe," said Diana, musingly.

"Nothing is easier. I will call upon him at Elmstead this very afternoon, and invite him to visit us at Redmond Hall," exclaimed the young baronet. "I will invite Mr. Dalyell also. I do not like Dalyell. I have met him at the clubs in London, and in society, but we are on speaking terms, and I will ask him to accompany the earl. With Mr. Edgely and Mr. Paulet, our circle of guests, although small, will be complete."

While Sir Hugh and Lady Redmond were discussing the earl Lord Thorncombe was satisfying himself of the identity of the beautiful girl who had made such a vivid impression upon his mind.

He had been staying several days at the country house of Colonel Arthorpe, an old friend, and expected to return to Essex some three days hence. The three gentlemen were on their return to Elmstead from a morning drive to Oxford.

Turning to his host, after the phaeton had passed, Lord Thorncombe inquired, eagerly:

"Who is that lady with Sir Hugh Redmond, Arthorpe?"

"Lady Redmond," replied the colonel, smiling. "Sir Hugh's young bride, whom he brought home last month, and who has been making such havoc among Berkshire hearts. I see that she has gained one admirer more, my lord. But, seriously, is she not remarkably beautiful, wonderfully lovely?"

"Is her mind in keeping with her person?" asked the earl.

"Her mind is thoroughly cultivated; her manners are perfect; and I hear that she is warm-hearted, sweet-tempered, and gentle; a perfect woman, nobly planned!"

"Sir Hugh's a lucky dog!" remarked the Hon. Egbert Walton, Colonel Arthorpe's second guest. "I met Lady Redmond at a party some days ago. By Jove! do you know, my lord, it flashes upon me now that she looks like you! Upon my word, she does!"

she certainly has a Berwyn look. I don't mean that she resembles you with your gray hair and moustache, of course, and your features are massive and rugged, as if cut out of rock, while hers are delicate; but there is a resemblance, although I cannot fix it. You have met Lady Redmond several times, Arthorpe. Can't you see the resemblance I allude to?"

"Why, now you speak of it, Walton," said the colonel, "I fancy I do. It's not in the eyes, nor the features. It's in the shape of the face, and something else intangible that I cannot explain. They have both round faces, but hers is delicate as an apple-blossom."

Lord Thorncombe felt an inexplicable stirring at his heart. There was considerable agitation in his manner as he asked:

"Who was she before her marriage?"

"Miss Paulet, of Dorsetshire. Good old family," said the colonel. "Mr. Paulet lives among his books, and doesn't go in society. Lady Redmond is his only child."

"I should like to see more of her," said the earl. "I must meet her. I must call upon Sir Hugh Redmond to-morrow, and revive old acquaintance."

But that very afternoon Sir Hugh Redmond called upon the earl at Elmstead.

The interview was very pleasant. Lord Thorncombe made few inquiries concerning Lady Redmond, schooling himself to conceal his deep interest in her, and before leaving Sir Hugh invited him to spend a fortnight at Redmond Hall.

The earl accepted the invitation with eagerness.

"I should be pleased to have Mr. Dalyell accompany you," said Sir Hugh, courteously. "We shall invite Lady Redmond's father, Mr. Paulet, and her relative, Miss Edgely, also to visit us."

"Dalyell is not with me," replied Lord Thorncombe. "He's stopping in town, very intent upon certain interests of mine. He needs relaxation, and I accept your invitation for him, Sir Hugh. I will write to him myself to-day."

"If you will be so kind. When may we expect you at the Hall?"

"If convenient to you, we will come on Tuesday next."

It so arranged. Sir Hugh returned home to communicate the success of his embassy to Diana, and the earl retired to write to Dalyell, whom he believed to be still engaged in the search for George Berwyn's missing daughter. He urged Dalyell to come to Oxford, where he would meet him on Tuesday, and they would proceed together to Redmond Hall.

Dalyell received this letter the next day, soon after his return from Quarry Cottage.

He appeared at Thorncombe House, tired, and with a weight of guilt upon his soul which even all his jubilance at having rid himself of his despised wife could not remove.

He was free, he told himself a score of times—free! But at what a price? His thoughts dwelt upon Lotte, lying stark and dead at the bottom of the old disused chalk-pit. He wished that he had not gone down to the cottage—that he had suffered the Glossops to proceed in their own way. That flying figure, moving to and fro in the gloom of the cottage garden, with frenzied shrieks and mortal terror, haunted him.

And the boy? He believed Mike dead also. And though he experienced no regret and no remorse for the last night's tragedy, he felt strangely uncomfortable and ill at ease, and experienced a longing for some fresh excitement to remove this horror from his mind.

"At any rate, I am free now," he thought, exultantly. "I am rid of that low-born pest, whom nothing could have persuaded me to marry except the supposition that she was the earl's heiress. I was duped handsomely. I always hated her. And when I found that she was the daughter of a low, brutal fellow who had been hanged for murder I loathed her! She is dead. And now I am free to play upon Lady Redmond's fears. Her husband was probably unharmed by our little affray, but he is likely to make her home exceedingly warm and unpleasant for her in these days. He saw me, but did not recognize me. How did she explain our meeting? Was he clever enough to forgive her without explanation? She is not the sort of woman to screen herself by a falsehood."

He flung himself upon a sofa at full length.

"I'd like to know how she got out of the scrape, and if there's any likelihood of a separation," he mused. "Lotte is dead, and her spy also. I shall form matters with Lady Redmond to a crisis. I shall make her leave Sir Hugh and come to me. But how am I to do it?"

Had he been really Philip Ryves—really Diana's husband—his way would have been clear.

But he was obliged to move with exceedingly great caution. If Diana should be driven to confess the truth in all its breadth to her father or husband, it would come out that Philip Ryve was dead and buried, that she was truly and legally Sir Hugo's wife, and that he, Dalyell, was an imposter!

"I should be shown up in a pretty bad light in that case," he muttered. "What would Sir Hugh and the earl say? I must steer clear of all these rocks in my way. I must manage the thing cleverly. Let me think it out."

He was engaged in "thinking it out" when a servant entered, bringing the earl's letter.

Dalyell tore it open lazily, and read it in amazement, wrath, and dread.

"The earl in Berkshire!" he ejaculated. "He has met Sir Hugh Redmond! He is going to visit Redmond Hall! Perdition!"

He sat up and plunged his hands through his hair, and breathed like one who has been running swiftly.

"He has seen Lady Redmond, and she turns out to be the girl whom he saw in the park last July. He is fascinated with her. And Sir Hugh invites me to visit him! Me!" and he laughed jeeringly. "Was there ever such a complication? What am I to do?"

He studied the question in all its bearings.

"If I leave the earl there, without me at his elbow, to meet his questions, he may pry out the truth!" he soliloquized. "The fact is there. Lady Redmond is the earl's own granddaughter. And there is a possibility that that fact may crop out in some way, unless I exercise all my tact to prevent it. I must go to Redmond Hall. Lady Redmond does not know me as Dalyell. I must manage to see her alone first of all and put her on her guard, or she might betray herself. By Jove! it's a hazardous affair, but I'll risk it! I'll venture into the lion's den, in propria persona. I'll carry out my plans under the very noses of Lord Thorcombe and Sir Hugh Redmond, and bear away my prize before their very eyes! Lady Redmond shall have the two men whom she believes her two husbands on her hands both at once! And, in spite of them all, I'll win my game!"

And, making the best of the situation, his spirits and courage rising to the occasion, he sat down and answered Lord Thorcombe's letter, accepting the invitation of Sir Hugh Redmond, and promising to be at Oxford on the following Tuesday.

CHAPTER XL.

For a moment after the disappearance of Lolette over the precipice into the chalk-pit the three conspirators regarded each other dumbly, fairly appalled by their success.

Then the hunchback, with an inarticulate growl, hurried to the open gate and peered cautiously over into the abyss that yawned below him.

His straining vision could make out nothing, except here and there near the top a projecting bush. Below these all was blackness of darkness. He could hear nothing, not even a moan.

He closed the gate and locked it. Some vines had grown across it and he had torn them aside. He replaced them hastily, and hurried back towards Dalyell and Mrs. Glossop.

"She's dead!" he said, hoarsely. "Dead as a herring."

"You couldn't see anything of her?" questioned Dalyell.

"Nothing, nor I didn't hear anything either. She's past groaning."

"We'll go down into the quarry at daybreak," said Mrs. Glossop, "and find the two bodies and bury 'em, so they won't ever turn evidence against us."

"Are you sure the boy is dead?" asked Dake Glossop.

"I'm sure," asserted Dalyell, "but you can see for yourself. That gate was the only outlet from the garden. If he didn't go out at it he's in the garden still."

The housekeeper and her son made a hasty search of the grounds, woodshed and house, and, finding nothing of the lad, agreed with Dalyell that he had shared the fate of Lolette.

"And so much the better," growled the hunchback. "If he escaped it would be all up with us. He would swear us into the hangman's hands."

Dalyell shuddered.

"I must be off," he exclaimed. "I have barely time to reach Norbourn before the train leaves. I shall never come back here. Here's a paper I made out before I came here, giving the furniture, rent and lease to you. Here's my name signed to it—Joseph Brown. And here," he added, "are the fifty pounds I promised you. Be sure to bury the two bodies in a safe place in the early morning."

He tossed the money and paper into Mrs. Glossop's greedy hands, and moved towards the garden gate. The hunchback went with him and let him out of the grounds, and watched him for a brief space as he strode rapidly over the common in the gloom. Then Dake closed and locked the gate, and returned to his mother.

"This has been a good speculation for us," said the gaunt old woman. "We are provided for a long way ahead, Dake. The furniture is all ours, and worth nigh two hundred pounds. Think of that! Mind we are up and in the chalk-pit by daybreak. When the two bodies are buried we shall be perfectly safe. Come in now, and we'll count the money."

They passed into the cottage together.

Little Mike, hidden under the ash-barrel, in a cramped and painful posture, waited patiently a full half-hour before he ventured to stir. Then he cautiously raised his covering, and crept out from beneath it.

His legs were weak and trembling, and his first care was to rub them thoroughly.

His next thought was to see if the Glossops had returned to their beds. A light in the housekeeper's room in the upper storey convinced him that mother and son were still up, and in close consultation, probably over the disposition of the bodies of their victims.

"I'll hurry to Norbourn," thought the lad, "and get a constable, and have him arrest these vampires long before daylight! Poor missus! It don't seem possible as she's dead! She might be lyin' down there, bruised and dyin', this very minute! P'raps she's calling me!"

The picture he had conjured up in his imagination wrought upon him.

It was barely possible that Lolette had not been instantly killed. She might be suffering, dying now. He resolved to descend into the chalk-pit and see for himself.

"It won't take me more'n twenty minutes," he assured himself. "I can get over to Norbourn and back with the police afore daybreak. I will see!"

He carried the ash-barrel to the side of the wall. An old blanket, which had been hung upon a clothes-line, was next appropriated, thickly folded, and deposited upon the top of the wall. Bidding defiance to the broken bottles, Mike clambered over, and dropped down outside in safety.

Creeping in the shelter of the wall to the front of the cottage, he found the cart-track, and pursued its deep descent for some distance until he came to the entrance to the pit.

The cottage was now far above him, and he was completely screened from the gaze of any one who might chance to peer from its windows.

Now he ran along the quarry at full speed, examining the ground carefully, and calling softly upon Lolette.

No answer came. He explored the pit thoroughly, and to his amazement found no trace of her.

He himself, from his concealment, had seen her go over the side of the chalk-pit—and yet she was not over there!

Had the tremendous fall not killed her? Had she crept away to die?

He ran back to the mouth of the pit, exploring in every direction for some distance, but he found no sign of her.

"If this 'ere an't too myster'us," he muttered. "She hasn't left even a grease-spot."

He had in his pocket the box of matches he had taken from the cottage kitchen. He lighted several, one at a time, and wandered about with them. He could not find that Lolette had even struck the bottom of the pit.

"Looks like some bushes up there. Could she have lodged into 'em?"

As no other solution to the problem of her whereabouts offered itself, he was obliged to consider this one more fully.

With his matches he examined the sides of the pit. There were patches of soil intermixed with the chalk at frequent distances, and nearly every patch held a scraggly bit of vegetation.

The boy calculated the point from which Lolette must have fallen. The side of the pit shelved inward at a slight incline. He decided that he could climb up for some distance, and began the task without delay.

About half way up the steep, a clump of bushes, larger than the rest, projected. As Mike in his bare feet neared this clump he made up his mind that if he did not find Lolette at this point he should relinquish his personal search and go for help.

He climbed nearer and nearer to it. He reached it at last, his feet bleeding, and swung himself lightly into the gnarled and misshapen shrub.

Then he thrust his head forward, peering upward.

A very unpleasant sensation came over him as he suddenly encountered the glare of a pair of shining eyes not three feet above him!

Could the hunchback have let himself down from the garden? Did a wild boar have its lair in the chalk-pit? Poor Mike was frightened.

But as the owner of the eyes made a movement at silent retreat Mike became himself again, with a wild hope.

"Missus!" he whispered. "Missus!"

"Mike!" answered Lolette's voice. "Is it not Dake? Is it really Mike?"

"It's Mike—safe and sound!" cried the lad, in a thrilling whisper. "You can speak yet. Are you dying? Are you badly hurt?"

"I don't know. I fell into the tree, thank Heaven, and that saved my life. I fainted away when I lodged here, and when I wakened I saw lights below me and heard some one moving about, and I thought the Glossops were come to bury me. Oh, Mike, Heaven be praised that you have come to save me! My face is all cut and bruised. My arm is broken. They meant to kill me—"

"But they didn't succeed! We must get out of this, missus, as soon as we can. Come now, try to climb down here. Give me your hand. But take off your shoes first. Stocking-feet is better."

Then, assisted by Mike, and groaning and crying, she descended to his side.

He lighted matches and examined her face and arm. The former was torn and scratched by the bushes into which she had fallen; the latter was really broken.

"We must make haste to get down, or they'll kill us, sure enough," he exclaimed. "Shall I leave you here and go for help?"

"Don't leave me. I can get down," groaned the woman. "Keep my hand, Mike. So!"

The descent was very difficult and full of frightful perils. Lolette clambered backwards, feeling her way like an infant, and guarding her broken arm and crying pitifully with every foot of progress.

But at last they reached the bottom.

Mrs. Dalyell sank down helpless, and Mike entreated her to make a farther effort, or they would be discovered by their enemies.

Thus entreated and assisted, Lolette crept to the end of the pit and for a little distance upon the common. Then she sank down again, completely exhausted.

"I am so weak," she moaned. "I have had no food since yesterday, and I wore out all my strength in beating upon the cellar door. I cannot walk to Norbourn, Mike!"

"But come a little farther," pleaded the lad. "Come out of the track. They'll find you here and kill you."

He helped her on a little farther, and then sat down beside her.

"I think I could get over to Norbourn and back," he said, "before the day breaks, but it will be a close run. Do you see the lights moving in the cottage? I believe them Glossops are going into the chalk-pit with lanterns. They promised Mr. Brown to us buried early in the morning."

"Let me rest a few minutes and I can go on!" panted Lolette. "Is he—Dalyell—gone?"

"Two hours ago. He's gone back to Lunnon. He paid them Glossops fifty pounds for this night's work!"

The woman moaned.

"I followed him last night to Berkshire again?" pursued Mike, "and I came to-day to tell you what I found out. But, missus, is this Dalyell your husband?"

"Yes—yes!"

"He's got another wife in Berkshire," said Mike. "He called her his wife—"

"A wife! Another wife?"

"Yes, missus. She gave him money to go away and leave her alone."

"Another wife? I never dreamed of such a thing! Another wife? That's why he wanted to kill me, so he could claim her! But I'm not dead yet. Take me to see this other wife, Mike. If she's his wife, what am I? Yet I must be his wife, or he would not want to kill me."

Lollette sat up, animated by new energy and strength.

"Another wife!" she repeated. "Come, Mike, I think I can walk to Norbourn."

"Them Glossops are coming downstairs," said Mike, watching the cottage lights. "They must be going to the chalk-pit. Come, missus."

The two moved onward together. After a few minutes the woman moved slowly and feebly, but she would not suffer the lad to go on and leave her. She struggled to keep on her feet, and Mike lent her all the assistance he was able.

They were an hour in reaching Norbourn.

Lolette by this time was in such pain that they roused up the proprietor of the inn and demanded rooms. Lolette told as much of her story as she deemed necessary, omitting the name of Dalyell and speaking of him as Mr. Brown.

A surgeon was sent for, but as he lived several miles distant he did not arrive before eight o'clock.

He set Lolette's arm and prepared medicaments for her wounds. Mike had discovered that the purse in his possession was Mrs. Dalyell's, and he restored it to her. She was thus able to pay the surgeon and to command the best attentions of the innkeeper.

As soon as Lolette was able to see him a police officer was in attendance. He heard the story of the fugitives, procured a warrant for the arrest of the three conspirators and, taking an assistant with him, went out to Quarry Cottage.

But the Glossops had disappeared.

They had visited the chalk-pit, found no traces of their prey, and realizing that the pair had, in some miraculous way, escaped them, made a precipitate flight.

Telegrams were sent to London, and to various ports, to have them arrested on arrival, and here the pursuit rested.

Lolette and Mike remained nearly a week at the inn at Norbourn, the former growing stronger every day, and then they took the train for London.

"I've got one thing to do," said Mrs. Dalyell, vindictively. "I'm going to have vengeance of Piers Dalyell! He's had his turn; now comes mine! Another wife, eh? We'll see!"

(To be continued)

SECRET POWER.

CHAPTER VII.

At the thought of meeting the seer turbulent feelings surged in the breast of the artist, and, although he tried to repress them by his strong will, sought to dispel them by argument, and endeavoured to ameliorate their intensity by an exercise of his sense of justice, yet they remained, and he felt towards him as if he had done him some great wrong.

He mentioned this feeling of compunction to his companion.

The sculptor, however, did not share in his ideas upon the subject.

On the contrary, he thought that his friend's kindness of heart misled him.

Lander's strong common sense caused him to look upon the seer's profession as only a cloak for impudence and extortion, he did not give the slightest credence to his assumed supernatural insight.

In a few brief, energetic words he exhorted his friend to self-control that he might be the more fitted to contend with the seer.

As the two gentlemen entered the seer arose, smiled blandly, and, condescendingly, said:

"This is against my rule, but brotherly love and the sweet knowledge that I can help suffering humanity, induced me to admit you. I hope I am meek and thankful."

"Excuse me," interrupted the artist, with an impatient wave of the hand, "but our time is precious. Signor, can you hold converse with the living at a distance as well as with those who inhabit another world?"

A brilliant light crept into the eyes of the seer, and, bending his head so that his expression might not be noticed, he passed his hand over his brow several times, and then, looking up, slowly answered:

"I can sometimes, but not always. You see, the conflict of the spiritual influence with the earthly object is, in such cases, liable to produce confusion, and, in addition to that, it wearis me very much."

Matthew gave no heed to his words, but, turning his dark eyes upon him, sternly asked:

"Did you give such an interview to a tall, light-haired, blue-eyed gentleman on Tuesday evening?"

The seer bent his arms, with the palms of his hands upwards, drew in his shoulders, inclined his head, and smiling with an air of wisdom and depression, said:

"I cannot tell you."

"What?" exclaimed the artist, springing forward and raising his hand warningly, "you say that?" Do not trifle with me!—I will not endure it!—but tell me quickly what you know of him!"

"If the signor will wait until I finish," said the seer, in an injured tone and lifting his eyes, "he shall hear. The gentleman visited me and I gave him the benefit of my power; more than that I know not."

There was a certain something in the tone which, like a spark of powder, caused the flood of anger

and grief in the breast of Matthew Hart to break its confines, and, while his brow became dark and his face whitened with wrath, he said:

"I believe you speak falsely, old man! Stop! don't you dare to speak until I have ended! You know that that visitor has been missing since. Yes, you do; I see it now, but I knew it before. But there is one thing more—I am his friend, living or dead. I loved him, old man, as few can love. He was my brother in war, my friend in peace; I will seek for him till death. Now, tell me truly, where is he? Be careful; I'm hardly myself now, as I think of him—as I see him, in my mind; if you falsify I shall know it. Now, speak."

The seer clasped his hands, opened his mouth, and glanced appealingly upwards, in that woful, sanctimonious way. Then, placing his hand upon the black, glistening hair of the artist, he moaned:

"Oh, cast out the wrath from this erring, hot-blooded youth! let him be calmed and the spirits of evil driven away!"

Valiantly had Matthew struggled to suppress his spirit, but when that man's hand came in contact with his head it seemed as if his veins of blood had changed to streams of fire, and, while a sickening, revolting, maddening sensation crept like poison through every artery of his body, he caught him by the collar and, shaking him furiously, wildly, exclaimed:

"Hypocrite, cease this cant! Where is he—he, my friend, my brother? What have you done with him, monster? Now, tell me, or I will tear you to pieces!"

"My dear Mat," interposed the sculptor, placing his hand restrainingly upon his arm, "compose yourself; you are—"

"Silence, Lander! I will not be checked, even by you. He shall confess—he shall restore Vane. Every feeling of my nature tells me I am right—that this man is a traitor!"

And he increased his force until the seer's teeth chattered, but he made no resistance, only mumbled incoherent words and rolled his eyes.

Suddenly the curtain at the opposite wall was pushed aside, and, with his eyes glaring, his mouth distended, and his sharp teeth shining like daggers, the dog bounded into the room and sprang toward the artist.

The heart of the sculptor seemed to stand still! then drawing a pistol, and running his eye over the barrel he—

At that instant the hand of the seer fell upon the head of the dog, and, obedient to the touch, he dropped upon his fore feet and remained quiet.

"That was a noble act, Mat," said the sculptor, in blended pleading and reproof. "You surely will not doubt the signor after this. Remember he has saved your life."

The artist spoke not, but released the seer, and stepping back gazed steadfastly into his face as if he would probe and analyze each thought of his mind, every purpose and pulsation of his heart.

During this severa scrutiny the features of the seer were moving, but his expression changed not; that look of forbearance and melancholy still remained.

At length he glanced from one to the other, and smoothing his hair with a weary motion, said, in that drawling voice:

"I am meek and lowly; I am contented to receive unkindness for it is the lot of those who are my brethren. We are vilified, but in good time the truth shall be known far and wide, then our day of joy shall come. The spirit influences has thus far kept down my human passions, and I trust it ever will. I forgive you, my young friend, freely, and when the light shall come you will rejoice with me."

Contempt, distrust and anger glistened in the dark eyes of the artist; his hands closed until the cords stood out upon them, and it was only by a great effort that he controlled himself, and moved rapidly from the room.

Mr. Lander spoke a few words with the seer and then followed.

As he found his friend, he said, in a perplexed tone:

"The signor is a strange man, Matthew; a contradiction—"

"A villain!" interrupted the artist, impetuously.

"Why not say it at once?"

"Because I cannot believe it," replied the sculptor meditatively. "There is not one man out of a hundred who would have borne your harsh usage so quietly; there is not one out of fifty who would have prevented the dog from reading you."

Matthew abrigged his shoulders disdainfully and walked on in silence.

The look and actions of the seer had confirmed his previous suspicions, and the fact of his treating him so leniently had, instead of mitigating his doubt, increased it, for he believed him to have acted from motives of policy alone. The knowledge that the

dog belonged to the seer had also given rise to new conjectures, while in connection with the boy he nourished hopes which, though vague, were singularly strong.

In a moment they reached the caff.

At the extreme end of the room, in a small compartment, sat the thin boy, bending over a table upon which were several kinds of meat and pastry, and using his knife with wonderful rapidity, while under this new influence his melancholy faded away, his face assumed a look of feverish eagerness, and his eyes dilated and glistened with a happiness almost wild.

As the gentlemen entered, he started as if from a dream; then he nodded his head, smiled in delicious sort of way, and again attacked the viands voraciously, ravenously.

"Oh, it's so good! I'll never forget you. I wish I could take these shocks three times a day, I do. I'm glad now—never was before. Oh! I haven't touched the pastry yet; I must—it's so nice! Oh!"

At length he ceased, glanced from one to the other, and then towards the remainder of his repast with regret, as if he were parting from a very dear friend.

Anon, however, the strange feeling of strength which pervaded his being caused him to open his mouth very wide and laugh in a manner almost hysterical.

"I actually believe him crazy," remarked the sculptor, gazing upon searching.

The boy calmed his excited ruminations, and bonding forward, while his hands involuntarily passed to and fro over his stomach, he vehemently said:

"I could almost think so by the feeling here—I never had it before. I've always been full of air—hollow, you know—and now, why, I feel so strong and big, just as if I was fat! Oh! I wish I could do something to pay you for making me feel like a human being. I've been a skeleton until now, I have."

"I wish no reward," returned the artist; "but I desire you to do me a favour."

"Well," exclaimed the boy, rubbing his thin hands and shaking his long, narrow head, "what is it? I shall be very glad to, for I've had a jolly meal. Oh! such fun as eating is. I wish there wasn't any such thing as electricity, don't you? I've been lifted up by my hair—can't do it much more, though, for it's getting thin—and knocked down with it many a time. It don't hurt me s—much now to fall, for I'm so lean that I bounce."

There was some humour in these words, produced probably by his dinner; but a great deal more sad suavity, which proved conclusively to the gentlemen, what they had before imagined, that the seer amused himself by experimenting upon the boy with electricity. This aroused the artist's indignation, and, with more earnest force than he otherwise would have used, he said:

"You have been ill-treated, that is only too evident. I cannot promise to better your condition at present; but if you will serve me, you shall be happier ere long. I wish you to tell me what passed between your master and the light-haired gentleman who called on Tuesday evening."

"No—no!" ejaculated the boy, contracting his facial muscles and shaking his head rapidly. "Don't ask me about master. I don't know that, and I don't like to talk about him—he glanced around apprehensively, and his voice changed to an excited wail. "He's awful when he's angry; he—oh! don't speak of him, you make me feel bad again. I wish I hadn't seen you. Oh! forgive me for that; but you don't know what I suffer."

"Poor fellow," mused Lander, compassionately, "his lot is indeed a hard one."

"I do not wish to pain you, my boy," said Mat, kindly; "but there is a great interest at stake—perhaps life." He felt that he could trust him, and added: "The gentleman of whom I spoke has not been seen since that night."

The boy trembled, his wan face grew deathly pale, his long fingers worked together nervously, and from his lips in gasps came the words:

"Oh! isn't it dreadful? He was such a handsome man, wasn't he? You frighten me, you do. Don't look so hard at me. I don't know anything about it. Only found something that scared me before; here it is; I will give it to you, for you've been good to me. Don't never tell—never! I shall die an awful death if you do! Here—here is what I found."

He held forth a paper. With fast-beating heart, and fingers trembling from feverish eagerness, the artist grasped it, spread it open, and read:

"Tuesday, 8 p.m.

"DEAR FRIEND,—I've had an interview with the seer. He has given me some facts in regard to my own life, also information of Claries; the truth of which I am now about to test. I go now to a house situated near the Arno, and described by the seer as

having only two windows on the side facing the street. May I have success in the prayer of

"Your friend,

"V. V."

"I should have had this Tuesday evening," exclaimed Mathew, in perturbation. "It has been detained, and by fraud. Tell me, boy, where did you find it?"

"Oh! don't speak cross," pleaded the boy, in a tremulous voice, "and I'll tell you all. I picked it up from the floor in the entry Tuesday night, at ten o'clock—that is all I know of it."

The two friends glanced at each other inquiringly, wonderingly, sadly, yet thankfully. A faint clue was given them, and on that they founded many hopes.

"I must go now," said the boy, arising, "or I shall have to pay for it. He'll be mad if he knows I've been away. I thank you, sir, very much; you have given me what I needed most."

"Stay one moment," said the artist, placing his hand on the boy's arm and gazing steadily into his face; "let me caution you not to breathe one word of this. If you do—"

"No, no; I wouldn't be idiot enough for that," interrupted the boy, with a grim smile, "even if I didn't care enough for you not to, for you know it would bring me out, and then—" he shuddered, and his eyes rolled upwards, "I shouldn't suffer; but let me go, or he will know that I have been away." And with a nod to each and a regretful glance at the food he could not eat, he ran from the saloon.

"Now, Mathew, what are you going to do?" said the sculptor. "You know that Vane wrote that letter and started for the house thereon, referred to—that is all."

"I am going immediately to the commandant of police. Signor Luis, a famous detective, can undoubtedly, clear up this mystery, with this note for a basis. Come, you will go with me?"

The sculptor signified his assent, and, arising, the two passed out and walked swiftly on, until they reached the police head-quarters.

Upon inquiring for Signor Luis, their attention was directed to a man of medium stature, with a singularly placid face and mild eyes, who sat in a small room at the left, with his elbow resting upon an elaborately wrought desk.

"He doesn't much resemble the popular idea of a detective," whispered Lander; "but one thing is certain—he looks like you, Mathew, enough to be your twin brother."

The artist made no reply, but he noticed and wondered at the similarity of countenance; the detective had also perceived it, for as they approached he looked up with a smile of surprise and remarked lightly upon the subject.

Mathew answered his question, and then stated the object of his visit, at the same time relating the circumstances, as far as he knew them, of the pursuit of Clarice and the disappearance of the sculptor.

For a moment after the artist had concluded his narrative the detective sat silent, gazing meditatively upon the floor, while at intervals his brows contracted and his head moved slowly, as if his mind were trying to force a conjecture into a conclusion. At length he looked up and queried:

"Can you let me see the warning you referred to?"

"Fortunately I can," rejoined the artist, "as my friend cared so little for it that he threw it away. I picked it up and preserved it. Here it is."

The detective took the paper, placed it upon the desk before him, and, leaning forward, scrutinized it closely for some moments. Then, igniting the wick of a small spirit-lamp, he held the writing near the blaze so that the hot air would circulate evenly upon its surface.

With eager interest, with wild hope actuated by love, the two friends watched that calm, thoughtful face and the bit of paper which in his possession seemed to increase in value, when suddenly there appeared upon it several letters in black which formed a startling contrast with the pale red above.

The detective smiled in quiet satisfaction, and, taking the paper away from the flame, read:

"The above is written in my blood. Oh, will Heaven ever send help?"

CLARICE."

"What! her blood!" ejaculated the artist, in mingled horror and rage. "Oh, what monsters they must be who have done this! And Vane is in the power of these fiends! The thought is madening!"

"Control yourself, my dear Mathew," said the sculptor, soothingly, "and let us hear the opinion of Signor Luis."

"It is of course perfectly plain to you," remarked the detective, "that this was written in invisible ink and in haste. It suggests to my mind two possibilities—either this woman is in league with

some secret foe, who is desirous of wreaking a revenge upon Signor Vane, or she is kept a prisoner against her will and is truthful."

"It cannot, I am sure, be the former," said the artist, earnestly, "for my friend was too good a judge of human nature to be thus deceived."

Signor Luis laughed lightly, and incredulously answered:

"Perhaps; at all events, he has been entrapped, if not deceived. Why I think the former the most reasonable is because there seems to be more reason for it. The girl is alone; there is no third party, which there would have to be to make the supposition of a plot against her perfect. Again, her acts do not favour her. Why should she run from Signor Vincent if she desired to be saved? She was not running from him—she was leading him into ambush."

"Then why should a warning be given him?" asked Lander. "Why should they not capture him then?"

"There was too much risk," replied the detective. "They knew that his ardour would be increased, and thus they would take him with less trouble."

"Then you think the seer is implicated?" queried the artist.

"I am not prepared to say so on the present evidence," returned Signor Luis, guardedly. "Whether his power is spiritual or physical yet remains to be proved. If we know where he sent Signor Vincent then we could form some idea in regard to it."

"Perhaps this will help you."

And Mathew gave him the note which he had received from the boy and repeated to him the manner in which it came into his possession.

The detective ran his eye over it and then remarked:

"This creates more doubt. The first thing to be considered is the probability of his having reached that house. You are not aware perhaps that it was formerly the abode of a very rich and eccentric old man, who, from fear of being robbed, had concealed traps in all of the upper rooms. Since then it has been remodeled and one or two persons have lived there, but only for a short time. I have often suspected the place and have caused it to be watched, but have discovered nothing. It is not likely Signor Vincent ever entered it, or, even having entered it, remained there for any length of time, for rogues, you know, are sharp, and keep a strict watch on the police. The next question is where was this note written? That answer will pave the way towards several conclusions."

He scrutinized the paper for a moment.

"Ah, the name has been scratched from the corner, but never mind, it is laid in the paper."

He held it up to the light.

"You see, gentlemen, there is the name, Caffé D'Alfonso. The person who sought to destroy the identity of that paper must have been a rogue. No one would have made such a blunder. It only remains now to ascertain how it reached the seer."

He struck a bell, and in answer thereto a subordinate entered.

"Pierre," said Signor Luis, "go to the Caffé D'Alfonso and bring back with you the waiter who started out with a note at eight o'clock on Tuesday evening. You will not fail to bring the right one."

"I will not, signor," replied the officer, and left the room.

The keenness and sagacity of the detective, combined with his unassuming manner, gentle dignity and refinement, had won the respect and confidence of the two friends, and in consequence their hope grew brighter, though it was mingled with a yearning impatience which seemed to prolong the seconds into minutes.

Presently Pierre returned in company with a tall, slim fellow, whose eyes moved restlessly around, as if in fear, and whose hands were continually passing over each other, as if to gain strength to enable him to pass through the awful ordeal which he imagined was before him, while at intervals a sickly smile lit up his features and his knees exhibited a tendency to bend more than nature in its movements would require.

Signor Luis, whose eyes had been directed meditatively to the floor, looked up suddenly and with an earnestness which partook more of sternness than he was aware of, hastily queried:

"Do you remember this note?"

"Yes—yes, signor," responded the waiter, starting forward, then backward, clutching at the shoulder of Pierre to sustain himself. "It was given to me by the man with the case, who had blue hair and yellow eyes—no, excuse me, signor, I mean blue eyes and yellow hair. Yes, signor. I hope, signor, I haven't—"

"Don't be frightened, my good fellow," interposed the detective, with a faint smile. "You are per-

fectly safe. I want you to tell me now if you carried the letter to its address, and if you did not, why you did not."

"Yes, signor, I'll try to—io," stammered the waiter, only half assured, and bobbing his head rapidly. "You see, signor, the man with the blue hair—eyes, I mean, gave me the note and off I started, a-whistling, as I always does when I'm feeling good-natured. Well, I goes along and pretty soon I heard a patter-patter-pat, the sound, you know, as if it was raining, but there wasn't no drops and the stars were out bright, and I knew it couldn't be water. So I didn't mind, but kept on walking and whistling, the latter swinging in my hands, but the noise kept up its patter-pat, and pretty soon, signor—ugh! it scared me, signor—I mean the black dog jumped up and took the little white letter out of my hand and ran off, signor—ran off before I could hardly see him. I was afraid like for a moment, and then I ran too, but I might as well chase a cloud through the sky, signor. I was sorry about it, signor, but I could do nothing."

"Can you not describe the dog more particularly?" queried the artist.

"I couldn't, signor," answered the waiter, more composedly. "I only know he was very large and shaggy and black."

The detective motioned Pierre to take the man away, and then said:

"It is evident that the dog is the property of the seer, but whether the seer is the innocent dog or an active agent of this unseen force I cannot say. In either case, it is best to leave him alone and work silently around him. There is one thing which this last discovery has suggested, if the seer is implicated; it is probable that the girl was not in the house of the dark side as it is called; but that she was secreted elsewhere, while Signor Vincent walked blindly into the trap thus set for him; this is based, you understand, upon the supposition of the girl's innocence."

"Which, in my opinion, is the most reasonable one," remarked the artist. "But what are you—we—to do? Every moment is a treasure as regards the safety of our friend."

"I think he is not in that house," answered the detective, meditatively. "However, we can visit it, and ascertain. The day will be the best time, for they would not expect us. I will send Pierre down to watch it, and I—you too, if you like—can follow an hour hence."

The two friends assented, and, after receiving directions in regard to the manner in which they should approach the house, and the point at which they should meet the signor, they departed, with hearts more hopeful, yet engrossed in the mists of doubt.

Punctual to the instant they appeared an hour later at a corner of a court below the dark-sided house, and anxiously waited for the signal that was to inform them of the presence of Signor Luis.

Aton 'twas given, and they hastily advanced, and, in company with him, entered the house.

All was still, and a semi-darkness pervaded the apartments.

Signor Luis ignited the gas, and the parlour, amid whose beauty Vane Vincent had walked two days before, was bare and desolate, only two threadbare, rusty chairs were visible.

Carefully they searched the rooms, sounded the walls, and listened for the slightest noise which should betray the presence of any living thing beside themselves, but in vain. No floors beat beneath their feet, no voice invisible greeted their ears, all was shrouded in a dreary gloom, a stillness of death, oppressive and dismal, and as the artist walked slowly from that damp, cold house the chill seemed to enter his heart, and in despair, he cried:

"Where? Oh, where?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE day passed slowly away, the night came, and with it only a little sleep, and that with troubled dreams, to suggest to the mind of Mathew Hart in more dreadful forms than when waking the fate of his friend.

In vain he tried to hope, in vain he exerted his imagination to picture to him the happiness that would be his when his companion should be restored to him. Restored!

The word seemed hollow and mocking, and as he gazed into the darkness around him, and pressed his hands to his heated brow, it seemed that the gloom which enshrouded his heart grew deeper with suspense, with grief, and the bonds of restraint and inaction were bound closer around the agitated spirit, and gave it the impetus but denied it the power to fly.

Morning came, and, with pallid face and eyes heavy from the loss of sleep, he arose and moved about like



[SIGNOR LUIS.]

an automaton, eating but little and glancing out of the window at intervals as if expecting some one, and then sighing, as only disappointment resulted.

Thus the day, the night, and another day passed away.

The light in the eyes of Matthew Hart told only too plainly of the sorrows, the lines of care which were stamped upon his brow, and the extreme pallor of his face seemed as if years their withering marks had left upon him.

It was early evening, and he was sitting in his room, his head sunk upon his breast, and his hands clasped before him, when the door opened and the sculptor entered.

The artist started expectantly, then as he saw his friend he dropped back into his chair and resumed his former despondent position.

The sculptor paused near the centre of the room, folded his arms and gazed upon his friend in blended sympathy, compassion, and regard. At length he advanced, placed his hand upon his shoulder, and, gazing earnestly into his face, said :

"Rouse yourself, Matthew, and throw off this melancholy. Believe me, Vane will be returned to us safe and well."

"Why do you say this?" exclaimed the artist, hastily arising and excitingly grasping his arm. "Have you heard anything? Speak!"

The intensity of the artist's words and his wild looks alarmed his friend, and he was fearful lest this continual perturbation, added to the exhaustive application which he had bestowed upon his picture for so long a time, should have an injurious effect upon his health, but he betrayed not his feelings as he soothingly, cheerfully replied :

"My dear Matthew, your vivid imagination has engendered half your trouble. It is true Vane has been gone a long time, but he is a very powerful, resolute man, he can endure more than you or I, and he has double our united strength. Surely this should cause us to feel easier about him, while the fact that we are doing all that mortals can do to discover and rescue him should make us calm."

"I know, I know, Lander!" said the artist, vehemently; "but my nature is not like yours, and then you know Vane and I were bound together by strong ties. He was an orphan—so am I; money was our only heritage and cold enough at the side of love. Having none to love us we grew to love each other, and now, when his fame is resounding through his own country and France, to have him lost, gone, perhaps murdered! Oh, Lander, I cannot still—I cannot subdue my anger—I cannot calm my grief."

And alternately striking and straining his hands

together, while words of anguish and wrath succeeded each other from his lips, he hurriedly paced the room.

Well knowing that in his present state words would only disturb him, the sculptor remained silent until his friend again seated himself, then he pleadingly said :

"Matthew, I beg of you for your own sake to try and ameliorate at least the violence of your emotion. You are, of course, aware that it cannot benefit Vane."

"Hark, hark!" interposed the artist, in a quick whisper, and softly rising to his feet he bent forward and listened. He heard steps upon the stairs, the sound came nearer, and the next instant there was a knock upon the door. With one spring he cleared the intervening space and threw it open. Pierre stood there.

"Well, well!" ejaculated the artist, "what is it? Have you heard from him?"

"Signor Luis wishes you to come to him immediately," returned the officer.

Without any farther questions the artist seized his hat and cloak and doffed them, and then, motioning his friend to follow, darted from the room and ran rather than walked to the office of the detective.

"Have you a clue?" exclaimed the artist, in mingled hope and fear, as he rushed in and caught Signor Luis by the hand. "Shall we find him? speak quickly."

The detective smiled in his calm way and earnestly responded :

"I hope so, for this is wearing upon you—but I see you are impatient and I will tell you what I have learned. As you are aware I have had officers watching places which I least suspected. By so doing I have blundered, merely blundered I assure you upon the track. At one of the old and unoccupied houses at the upper portion of the city a carriage has stopped every night at eight o'clock for the last three nights, and an old woman has alighted. My men watched the carriage, and ascertained that after leaving this place it proceeded to the house of the dark side and remained there a few moments, and then went away empty. I conclude from that some one, I know not who, is a prisoner in the house first referred to. I have acted upon this, and the house is now well guarded. I sent for you because I thought you would like to go with me. Now change your outside apparel for this extra coat and cap of mine and we are ready."

Every motion of the artist as he flung his own coat from his shoulders and assumed the one indicated by the detective showed that he was encou-

raged—that the prospect, ever so faint, of seeing his friend again had given him new animation. He did not speak, but his eye burned brightly and his step regained its quick, elastic movement as he walked on towards the house which would give him either pleasure or woe.

At length it was reached, and, proceeding cautiously to the rear, while the front was guarded by Pierre and his companions, the artist, in company with the signor, entered by the rear door, which the latter opened by a skeleton key, and advanced into the hall, which was only dimly lighted.

For a moment silence prevailed, then the house resounded with the shrill voice of an indignant female of mammoth proportions, who hurried downstairs as fast as her obesity would allow, and confronted the detective with a volley of coarse epithets.

The latter, finding that persuasion and argument were utterly futile, and that with his attempt at conciliation her wrath increased, stopped her wild gesticulations by placing a pair of handcuffs upon her wrists, and shut off the stream of abuse by tying a handkerchief over her mouth.

Matthew had been much annoyed by the delay this occasioned, and now he started rapidly forward towards the stairs, bounded up them, and rushed into the rooms upon the second floor, but saw nothing but a little plain furniture.

"Baffled! baffled!" he cried, despondingly. "Shall it ever be thus?"

"Do not give up," remonstrated the detective. "We have not searched one-fourth of the house yet."

With his sinking trust partially renewed, the artist ran over the third floor; but nothing animate greeted his eager gaze, and a greater portion of the fourth floor had been traversed, when at the extreme end of the entry he saw a door that was shut.

"Oh, Heaven! may this give me success." And with these words he dashed forward and struck his foot against the door with crashing force.

It flew open and revealed a girl kneeling upon the floor, her pale, lovely face upraised in mute supplication, and her small white hands clasped firmly together.

This vision, bursting so unexpectedly upon him, caused the artist to pause abruptly and gaze upon her in amazement. Then, as he realized that the last hope of finding Vane was destroyed, he put forth his hand and murmured, half-sadly, half-compas-

ately : "Not him—not him, but a woman!"

(To be continued.)



[FAREWELL.]

THE BARONET'S SON;

OR,
LOVE AND HATE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Winifred Wynne," "One Sparkle of Gold," etc., etc.

CHAPTER III.

Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart and gather in the eyes
In looking on the happy autumn fields
And thinking of the days that are no more.

The dinner had passed with unwonted and gloomy silence between Lord Delorme and his daughter after that ominous conversation and Lady Edith's equally pregnant interview with her old nurse.

The earl was never harsh or severe with his idolized daughter, on whom the whole tenderness of his nature seemed to be lavished, but he was grave and uneasy in his manner and abrupt in the answers to the various attempts at conversation which Edith essayed, till at last the spasmodic efforts totally ceased, and when the sweets disappeared a very brief interval ensued before both father and daughter adjourned to the drawing-room.

"Sing to me, Edith," said Lord Delorme, at length. "Do not fancy I am displeased, or churlish, my love, though I am not in the humour to talk as usual. The fact is that our discussion this afternoon recalled some painful memories that have long been buried—or rather smothered—in my heart. But I shall soon have fully arranged my plans for the future—so far as my duties are concerned to those dependent on me—and then I must once again try to forget the past."

He held out his hands to the girl as he spoke, and, drawing her toward him, kissed her tenderly with a kind of solemnity which thrilled through her already excited nerves.

But she quickly returned the caress, subduing all outward evidences of emotion, and then went to the piano and began to sing from memory some of her father's favourite ballads.

She went on till the dusky twilight gradually obscured the figures in the room, and her voice sounded dreamily, like an *Eolian harp*, or the music of the spheres, coming from some unseen source.

She had just finished the lovely, soothing strain of

Longfellow's: "The day is done, and the darkness," when she fancied she heard her own name spoken, in a suppressed tone, and, starting round, she perceived the figure of him whose lineaments were too deeply imprinted on her mind for her to mistake their identity in the thick obscurity of the apartment.

"Oscar, is it you? Oh, I am so glad—so very glad! Papa is there; go and speak to him," she added, hurriedly, as if fearful some words might be uttered not meant for the earl's ears.

"No; he has left the room. I watched before I came in, Edith," replied the young man, in strangely choking accents. "I shall only remain a few brief moments, and then go—for ever perhaps."

"Oscar, dear Oscar, be persuaded! Stay, if only to see papa, before you resolve finally. He is hurt that you should leave him so abruptly; he thinks it is distrusting him, after all he has done for you. For my sake, remain and consult him, and he will advise and help you too, if you will let him. For my sake, Oscar," she added, softly.

But though her voice would almost have recalled him from the portals of death—though he would have obeyed her lightest behest, as any knight of old obeyed the command of his lady love—yet in this instance it was powerless to turn him from his purpose.

"Edith, do not tempt me by such maddening words," he returned, bending over her till she could discern the intense love that so unmistakably beamed in his expressive features. "Can you not see that it is for your sake I must go? Ay, and unshackled by any burdens of obligations to your father. Can you not comprehend how I love you, Edith? how I would toil and struggle to win you as an honourable man should? And though the earl has been my sole friend in boyhood, yet I know full well it is madness to hint such a wish of intention to him. He would order me from his doors never to return, and I could not brook the scorn that a Vandeleur so little deserves, and I should say what he could never forget or forgive. Do you not understand that, Edith, you who have as high a spirit as you have beauty?"

"Yes, yes, I do," she said, the hand he had taken trembling in his clasp; "but still why not accept the help my father would so willingly give you to rise from your own exertions, and then in time the rest must come? You are Sir Lewis's only son; he cannot disown or disinherit you, Oscar."

"Yes, perhaps when I am past the enjoyment of my rights," returned the young man, bitterly; "but it were madness to wait till then. He has well nigh

cursed me, Edith, and but that I thought of you in your gentleness and love I should have flung back the maledictions on his head had he been twenty times my father. For your sake I risked the humiliation, and for your sake I forbore the bitter rejoinder to his injustice. Can I do more, dearest?"

"But still I cannot see why you should not accept my father's help," she persisted, her eyes thanking him for his effort even more than the pressure of his hand as he poured forth his grief.

"Because I will not put any barrier between us, Edith. He shall not say I used him as a stepping-stone to obtain what is the most precious gift he can bestow. I will be free—free to toil and to obey my own impulses, and then I will deserve you, and win you or die, Edith, in the struggle."

The girl dared not speak lest the tears should choke her voice and betray too plainly the deep love in her heart, which she knew it were cruelty to openly confess.

But at last she conquered herself sufficiently to trust her treacherous voice, and she said, in a firm though low tone:

"I must not urge you farther, Oscar, nor ought I perhaps to listen to such words from you. But I trust you from my very soul not to think or do one dishonourable deed to accomplish what you most desire. I only say one thing, Oscar. Remember that Edith Dupuy will weep for you, pray for you, and thi of you in all but sin or disgrace. For her sake, keep your honour and your faith pure and untarnished. Will you promise me this, Oscar, in return for all I shall suffer on your behalf, in silence and in solitude?"

Oscar Vandeleur could have taken that worshipped girl in his arms and poured out all his grief and love in one torrent of passionate words and caresses; but he forbore with stern self-control that spoke of rapture and more unselfish affection than the most rapturous assurances.

"Thanks, Edith; thanks for the safeguard you have given me," he said, eagerly. "It shall be a talisman in the hour of temptation and weakness. And listen, dearest," he went on, firmly. "I will not ask nor expect from you one pledge that can bind you to me, or fetter you in the event of happier prospects opening before you. If you do love me and trust me, you will not forget Oscar Vandeleur in any hour. If you change, Heaven forbid I should bind you to an unwilling sacrifice. Now farewell."

Edith gave him one long pressure of his hand, as if to convey to him the assurance that he would not ask for in words, and then he was gone out of hearing and sight and knowledge.

When should they meet again? Under what auspices? In what changing positions? With what feelings?

Such were the questions that suggested themselves inaudibly to Edith Dupuy in that first moment of stunning emotion.

She could not move nor even think of the present in the overwhelming considerations of the future, but, happily for herself, the entrance of servants with lights aroused her from the bewildering reverie.

"The earl bade me say, my lady, that he will be very late to-night, and that he hopes you will excuse him," said the butler, who was the messenger to recall her to the outward world. "Shall I bring coffee now, my lady?"

"Yes, and at once, Jenkins. I have a bad headache, and shall go to bed very soon," was the reply.

And in less than half an hour the young lady was in the dressing-room under the hands of her maid, preparing for bed, but whether to sleep or not remained a very doubtful point.

Lisette was a young damsel of tact and discernment sufficient to observe and respect her lady's evident desire for quietude during the operation, but whether she believed in the cause assigned was a problem that remained unanswered in her lively French brain, only to be solved hereafter.

Meanwhile, Oscar Vandeleur had rapidly taken his way through the private gardens, of which he still possessed the pass-key, that was the privilege of each member of the family at Lord Delmore's, and then through the most obscure parts of the inner park, till he came within sight of the hedge, where Alice Selwyn lived, and where the light still shone, an evidence that the owner had not yet gone to rest.

"Poor old thing," he muttered, "she is about the only creature who cares for me except Edith, and I will go and bid her good-bye; she will not blame me, I am certain."

He hastened on, and gave a quick, sharp tap at the cottage door, which soon brought the dame to ascertain the cause of the unusual knocking at such an hour.

"Bless me, Mr. Oscar—Heaven help us—who would have thought of seeing you—and at this time of night?" she exclaimed with breathless surprise, when her eyes had convinced her of the reality of the apparition. "And it's not so many hours since the Lady Edith was talking about you, as she sat in that very chair," she went on, while her guest placed herself in the seat that his cousin had occupied.

"Well, nurse, I thought I could trust you not to betray my presence here, and I would not go away for so long without giving you a farewell and a trifle to remember your troublesome charge by," he replied, in a tone of far more gravity than his heart prompted.

The old lady shook her head gravely.

"It's very little I want to remember you, Mr. Oscar, since there's few days when something about your old pranks and ways doesn't come back to my old head. Why, as I sit here, hour after hour, I have little else to do but remember old times, some of them pleasant and some of them sad, Mr. Oscar."

"And I have very little but gloom to look to in the future, nurse," he resumed, in his old tone of bitterness and despair. "You are about the only one I could speak to of my private sorrows, except my own near kindred, and it's no secret to you that I am an exile from my father's house, sent out on the world as if I were a foundling, or worse," he continued, fiercely. "It were better for me to give up my name, since I am so hateful to him who gave me birth, it is a disgrace to call myself by the same title that he bears. Nurse, can you explain why it is so? What crime have I committed, before or since my birth, that I should have this curse?"

Mrs. Selwyn laid her thin hand quietly on his arm and bent forward in his face.

"Mr. Oscar," she said, impressively, "I know but little, perhaps being but a servant, and not even of your own father's household. But one thing I do know, and it may be for your comfort to be told that there is no fear of the disgrace you speak of but now resting on your head. Your loved mother was as pure and sweet a lady as ever gave her truth to man, or brought boys and girls into the world. And so you cannot ever be kept out of your rights any way, and it's my belief that you will be very wrong to wish anything such as changing your name or going off to foreign parts, as brave followers have done, and never been known by their kith and kin upon their return. You'll take an old woman's advice in that, Mr. Oscar, won't you?" she said.

"I will, nurse," he replied, with a smile. "I will not give up the name that has been never disgraced yet, so far as the annals of our house show, and, as to going abroad, I have no intention to play the game which has cost both the country and the honour of many a nobly born person so dear. I will

not make another doubtful case of identity, you may rely on it, my good dame," he went on, with one of his old smiles, that recalled to her his boyish days.

"Ah, now you look like you need to do when you had done some mischievous prank when you were a child, and dared me to punish you for it, Mr. Oscar," she said, with the fond smile of a real-mother to her offspring. "But I'm mighty glad that you've got so much sense, anyhow, and that when Sir Lewis is gone, as must be in the course of time, there'll be no trouble of that sort for you to claim your own."

"Certainly not, nurse—so much I can promise," he said, firmly; "but now, before I start on my purposeful journey, I want you, as the very least, to tell me your ideas and fancies even as to the cause of my father's hatred to me."

Mrs. Selwyn paused for some moments over the reply. There was evidently a struggle between prudence and inclination in her mind, as to the answer she should give to the anxious question of her favourites.

"It's hard to say, when really you have no knowledge, Mr. Oscar, and what is mere, when it is about gentlefolks so much higher than one's self. But, if I were to say, I do believe it is because Lady Vandeleur was so fond of you, and tried to put you and to teach you, as much as could be possible for such a young child. At least, that's what I have been told by my own lady when you first came here. And she said you were an uncommonly clever child, Mr. Oscar, and that made your mother so proud of you when you learnt everything so quickly; and then, after she died, I suppose, it was quite different at the Hall."

Oscar seemed to catch at the words, though the signature they gave was obscure. He gave some other, at least, in the strange animosity that had seemed to surround his father's conduct to him since his mother's death. There was, for some cause or other, a bitter, rankling feeling in his father's mind towards him, but whether from excessive love for the wife he had lost or from snap-dragon dislikes could not yet be decided by the evidence.

"I believe you are right, Mrs. Selwyn," he said, thoughtfully. "At least, in surmising that my father was annoyed at his being supposed I had any precocious cleverness, as my poor mother fancied. Why, nurse," he went on impetuously, "do you remember that when I came here I knew little more than a peasant's son at a national school; save what I had learnt before my mother's death? Ay, and though I had read some books in the old library that were perhaps beyond my comprehension, all that a boy should have been taught was utterly denied to me. And when I went to him in shame and anger, too, after one day that I had seen my cousin Cecily and found what an ignoramus I was compared to him, and told my father I must go to school or have a tutor, unless he meant me to disgrace him and myself, he only laughed, that stern, bitter laugh of his, and told me I could learn if any one would teach me for nothing, but that he was not going to waste his money on my fancies.

"I am bound to give you board and lodgings," were his concluding words. "You can read and write, you think yourself very clever—go and try what you can do. That is all I have to say, and I will not hear one word more."

The young man paused; his voice became hoarse from the memories of the long-seated injustice and wrongs which had so recently been consummated.

The treatment of the boy and the man had been but too consistent.

He had been denied the common privileges of his rank as a child—he was exiled from his father's house as a man.

"Ah! poor boy—poor boy! You were like a bruised reed when you came to the castle," said Mrs. Selwyn, compassionately; "but you soon got over your troubles when little Edith took so kindly to you, and seemed to like you almost better than her brother. But then, of course, my little lord was always such a book-worm that there was no wonder the dear child preferred some one who could play with her as you did, sweet darling that she was."

"Oh, yes, certainly, it was very natural," said Oscar, quickly, determined not to compromise his beloved Edith even to the faithful nurse; "and now I must go, nurse, or I shall not get to Penzance to-night."

"See," he added, taking from his pocket a little box, "here is a brooch, nurse, that I got for you when I was in London. It was a stone that I used to wear in a large seal ring, and you will not forget me so long as you wear this, I'm sure."

The brooch, a large cameo, was set in white opal stones and a plain gold band, and was really a remarkably handsome trinket.

"Heaven bless you, Mr. Oscar! this is a great deal, too good for the likes of me," exclaimed the good woman, admiringly. "But still it shall never leave me till I die, and then I'll take care either you or some one that loves you shall have it when I'm gone. Now keep up heart, my dear young gentleman, for you will do well; no fear; and any way there's the bright sunshine on the other side of the thick cloud, whatever else comes between."

Oscar pressed the old woman's hand fervently in his own, and then, kissing her withered cheek, he rapidly left the spot, and rushed on as if he were flying from enemies rather than leaving those he loved best, and who were the only creatures save his sister Gladys who cared whether he was alive or dead, in sorrow or in joy.

CHAPTER IV.

"GLADYS, my dear, I have now to communicate to you that has given me great satisfaction," said Sir Lewis Vandeleur, with an unusual kindness in his manner, such as he rarely displayed, save to his youngest and favourite daughter, such which made Gladys rather surprised than pleased, so completely had Sir Lewis grafted the seeds of distrust in the minds of his older children.

He had summoned Gladys to his private library the week after his son's unexpected visit to the Hall, almost immediately after the arrival of the post, and the single sole hope in the message was that there might be by some extraordinary chance good news from Oscar or his relative, Lord Delmore, which inspired her father with such unusual serenity of feeling.

"I am very glad if you are so, papa, of course," she replied, though there was an air of doubt in the smile and look which passed behind her words; "but what is it, papa? And I to fetch Wenna to share in the news?" she went on, with vague thoughts to test her father's meaning.

"None! Oh, no, not in this case. Inconceivable you and your son are," returned Sir Lewis, hastily. "Of course I do not mean to say it is to be any secret from your sister, who is so remarkably prudent and intelligent, even at her tender age, that I should trust her quite as much as yourself, Gladys. Only in this case it may be as well that you should first be informed of your good fortune."

"What has happened to me, papa?"

"Oh, only what is a very usual event where young ladies of good family and average attractions are concerned," he replied, with a spic of resolution in his tone that seemed to imply at once the possibility and yet the uselessness of resistance. "I have received for you an offer of marriage which gratifies me in every respect, and I only await your assent to accept it formally, as it is made to me."

Gladys felt positively breathless. She ran over the list of her few acquaintances in her mind, for as yet she had only peeped out in the world of her own county, and not even undergone the usual presentation at Court; but she could not remember one who had distinguished her by any marked attention or who would be supposed to be a match so desirable in her father's eyes.

"I—I really cannot understand. I am sure I cannot give an assent so readily, papa," she stammered, at length. "It must be some one I know far too little for me to marry in such extraordinary haste."

"Oh, you shall have reasonable time before the wedding. I do not wish, indeed, that your sister should be left alone just at present," he said, quickly. "Let me see. Wenna will be seventeen next May, and then she might very fairly be presented, while you could appear at the same Drawing Room as a bride. So it seems to me that if you are married in March or so the affairs can be perfectly well arranged for all parties concerned."

Gladys felt her spirit rise now.

"Perhaps you will be so good as to tell me the name of the husband you have chosen for me before you arrange all those details, papa," she said, proudly. "I really am not to be disposed of like a piece of furniture or a new suit of jewels, though it may be a common occurrence for those in my rank of life," she added, with an involuntary indignation at the cold-blooded command that arranged her future so entirely in subservience to her young sister.

Sir Lewis was apparently fairly stunned by the unfeigned insolence as he considered it of his hitherto obedient daughter.

"Yes, I see; it is well, very well, Miss Vandeleur," he said, coldly. "Yes, I can trace the influence of our late visitor in this rebellious spirit. However, you are under age as yet and will be forced by law to obey my will; and if you are wise you will do it without any further hesitation or provoking me to use harsher words and measures."

Gladys calmly listened, but there was but little change in her beautiful features as she replied :

"Very well, papa. I have no wish to disobey or vex you, but still I may venture to ask who it is whom you intend for me and then to take time to consider what I shall do without any great offence."

The reasonableness of this rejoinder was yet more annoying to the stern father, but he was still sufficiently master of himself to meet it with apparent composure.

"Well, Gladys, I am willing to yield and to believe ye uso far as it is consistent with my duty and dignity as your father. Your first question is soon answered. It is Mr. Brooke Rawleigh, of The Larches, who is the suitor I have welcomed as your future husband; so far as my pleasure in the proposal is concerned, and I hope you will view so advantageous an offer in the same light."

Gladys actually panted for breath in the struggle to maintain the necessary calmness for her position.

"Mr. Brooke Rawleigh, papa? You cannot be serious," she said, scornfully. "It must be a cruel joke you are passing off on me."

"And pray why not? He is the very richest man in the country, not even excepting Lord Seldon, its Lord Lieutenant. I do not suppose he has less than twenty thousand per annum, Gladys, and his house and estate are about the most splendid and well cared for in the whole West of England. You are a fortunate girl to have attracted such a man, I can tell you."

"And he is twice my age, papa, low born, and unpleasing in every respect," said the girl, firmly. "I cannot believe you are so utterly indifferent to my happiness as to wish such a marriage, nor indeed so unkindly of our station and our long descent," she added, proudly.

For, indeed, Gladys was well versed in the story of her family's well-preserved annals, and the pride of birth was as strong in her as was possible in so generous and gentle a nature as was hers by temperament, even if somewhat hardened and embittered by her cold and unjust training.

"That may safely be left to my keeping," returned the baronet, fuming angrily; "and a girl like you must be very forward to talk of such matters when you have a father to think and decide on them for you. Mr. Brooke Rawleigh may certainly not boast of as long a pedigree as ourselves; and no doubt some of his wealth has been acquired in mines, which have added to the rent-rolls of our noblest families. But perhaps you do not know, Gladys, that his mother's family was of very good extraction, and he has taken her name in addition to his own, on purchasing some land that had belonged to them for some generations past. Therefore, your difficulties on that head may be very soon got over; and, as to his age and manners, you need not at all trouble yourself. He is in the very prime of life; he will always be acceptable in society as a man who can entertain in a style which few of our rank in life venture upon. You will be an indulged wife, and I shall take care to arrange that you will be well dowered and cared for on every occasion that may accrue."

Gladys bent her eyes on the floor, as if she was busy in examining and counting its inlaid davices.

She could not as yet fully decide on her reply. Not that for a moment she thought of accepting such an utterly odious suitor; but still, it was not in the nature of so young and helpless a creature to dare at a moment the wrath of one who had already proved himself so implacable.

"Papa, do you know how often I have seen Mr. Rawleigh?" she added, raising her eyes abruptly, and meeting the anxious and stern gaze of her father's with an unflinching look in her own bright and expressive orbs.

"I certainly have not kept such a register," he said, sarcastically, "but no doubt you will soon make up for any deficiency of that kind; you will see quite enough of him after you are betrothed, and still more as his wife."

"Which at present I am certainly resolved I will never be," she replied, with a degree of proud firmness equal to his own. "Nay, papa, do not look so stern," she went on, reproachfully, "you have no cause to do so, and you know it. How would you have liked to have married my mother in such a manner, while she knew little of you, and disliked that little, as I do Mr. Rawleigh?"

"Silence, girl," thundered the baronet, with sudden passion in his whole aspect, that well nigh daunted even the high-spirited Gladys. "Not one word more of such insolence. If you have anything to say about yourself, you will have to speak it now, and I will try to listen with patience to what more folly you may utter."

"It is no folly, papa, nor perversity," said the girl, firmly. "What I would say is this: I never even dreamed of this gentleman as any possible suitor of

mine, any more than the veriest peasant on your estate. And unless he seems very different to me than I consider him now I could not perjure myself by any vows to love and obey him. But rather than vex you by what may seem perversity I will take time to consider if it is possible. I could like him, if you will make him understand he is not in any way accepted by me."

Sir Lewis stared, literally stared at the girl, as she calmly uttered these words, that had neither passion nor perversity in their meaning. He would have willingly ordered her from the room, threatened her with any penalty that might be possible in the range of parental authority, or any other mad exhibition of passion that could have resulted from this obstacle to his plans.

But he instinctively felt that the girl had for the moment literally turned his flank, or, in other words, placed him at a disadvantage he could not for the moment recover.

"It is a very unreasonable demand, where so frank and so eligible a proposal is in question," he said, at last. "And I really cannot take on myself to say that Mr. Rawleigh will yield to its conditions. However, he may consider it a mere girlish coquetry, or, as he is a man of sense and of the world, it is possible he will not think worse of you for not jumping at the brilliant prospect he offers you. But there must be some definite time, Gladys; I could not suppose a gentleman of his position and age will dance attendance on you for an indefinite period, like a bearded pauper lad. How long do you ask for your probation?"

"You said it would be sufficient if the affair was to be settled in time for Wenna to be presented, papa," answered the girl, with an involuntary bitterness in her tone. "There can be no haste, therefore, in the matter, and I will give a final answer at Christmas; then will be ample time to arrange the rest."

The baronet's brow cleared somewhat. It sounded like a prospect of suspense when Gladys spoke thus, and he began really to hope that the whole drama she made was but a girlish device to display her power and to add to her lover's devotion and homage.

"It is a very long and unreasonable time to ask, Gladys," he said, doubtfully. "But you are very young, and, as you say, we may perhaps expect some deference to our rank and long descent from Mr. Rawleigh. It is enough to say that you are at present so very young that you have never even thought of marriage and that if you were left unblushing you would prefer remaining with your sister and myself for some time longer. This will rather add to the demur in your entertaining his proposal, and he may probably assent to my arrangement."

"But, mark me," he went on, more sternly. "I will have no nonsense, no underhand dealing, Gladys. If you take the least advantage of my indulgence I shall know how to punish and to meet it as it deserves. And Mr. Rawleigh must be treated as a respected and a very privileged guest during the time when he will be escorting you—previous to acceptance of him as a husband. You understand this, my dear," he added, more kindly, as he saw her colour painfully during the speech.

"I shall behave as a lady ought, I hope, papa, to one of your guests," she replied, "and for the rest, it must depend more on Mr. Rawleigh than on myself. If he give me no cause to behave to him differently, I shall never merit your displeasure by any breach of my promises."

"Very well. Then I suppose I am to be content," he said, quickly, "though it will still depend on the gentleman himself what should be the result. Now I presume there is nothing more to be added to this compact?" he went on, somewhat sternly, seeing that his daughter still lingered in the apartment.

Gladys had indeed somewhat paused in her departure, in spite of this abrupt dismissal.

An idea had indeed occurred to her, such as very few would have so instantaneously conceived, and which even now was by no means matured in her brain.

"Papa," she said, at last, "are you very anxious that I should contract this marriage?"

"I should have thought it very unnecessary to ask that question, Gladys," he replied, harshly, for his whole stern nature had been stirred by the objections she had made to a scheme which so entirely fitted in with his plans.

"Then, papa," she said, "supposing that I should find that I really could bring myself to consent to the marriage, would you be inclined to grant me any favour I might ask in return?"

Sir Lewis looked at her suspiciously.

"I might be inclined to go great lengths, Gladys," he said, "both to reward your submission and to show my pleasure and approval of the offered alliance; but, mark me, my promise is not altogether unconditional, and there is a name that it would be

dangerous to breathe in my hearing and a person whom I will not willingly ever see more. If it relates to him, remember, I shall certainly not feel my promise binding. But still, should you really make the sacrifice due from an obedient daughter you shall not find me wanting in what a father may do to mark his approval. Now go and leave me to answer Mr. Rawleigh's letter, as I would not wish to delay in such a reply as I have to make."

The girl slowly departed, with the air of one who had a stinging blow dealt to her that made her feel as if she were walking in her sleep rather than in the full possession of her senses.

She was about to seek her own apartment, that she might consider in quietude the startling tidings that had been conveyed to her, but as she was crossing the corridor in which the apartments of the girls opened, the door of the sitting-room stood so widely ajar that Wenna caught sight of the passing figure and at once called to her to come in.

"You need not be afraid, Gladys, dear," said the younger sister, in a voice of unusual kindness. "I am in the secret, I can assure you, and I want very much to talk to you about this wonderful event."

It is certainly a relief when any subject that especially concerns the heart is opened in the very source, as it were, of the emotions it has occasioned, and although Wenna was some two years or so the junior of her sister yet from the favour in which she was held by her father and the precocious character of her whole nature, she was more adapted to form a decided opinion and to give an absolute judgment than the more impulsive and yielding temper of the more ardent and romantic Gladys.

"What do you mean, Wenna? have you heard of—the extraordinary news papa has been telling me?" asked the elder, slowly advancing to the sofa which was the favourite post of her sister.

Wenna usually occupied the small couch that was placed in one of the bay windows, and before which was a small table, on which were books and work and writing materials; in the other corresponding window was Gladys's chair, an embroidery frame, a drawing table, and in the near neighbourhood a bijou piano of remarkable quality for its size.

The employments and the very tastes of the two sisters were indeed exemplified by the nature of these arrangements, for Gladys had a rare talent for music and drawing, while the younger girl was more bent on books of all kinds, and in two or three languages, and with, at times, comments on the various authors she read that perhaps betokened a degree of intellect which gave her more command over the stern mind and character of her father. On this occasion the girls were both seated side by side, and thus able to examine each other's features and to appreciate the secret and more hidden workings of the heart.

"You mean about Mr. Rawleigh's offer to you, is it not, Gladys?" returned the younger girl, quickly. "Yes, I know all about it."

"But do you mean that papa had consulted you, Wenna, before speaking to me?" asked Gladys, with a flash of anger in her beautiful eyes at the extraordinary idea.

"Oh! you need not be so scandalized, my wise sister," returned Wenna, coolly. "In the first place, I must tell you that I had quite an impression about this same suitor of yours long before papa told me that my impressions were correct. I watched him that day we all met at the cricket match, and I was sure that some such idea was working in his brain—he looked at you so very consideringly, and, besides, he never really left you during the afternoon, though you were so amusingly unconscious of his attentions and his very neighbourhood. However, I quite approve of the match—don't you, Gladys?" she went on, demurely enough to have completely deceived her sister either by purpose or otherwise.

Gladys cared little which might be the real feeling to prompt the question; her own nature was too impulsive and frank to maintain reserve, save from some powerful motive.

"Approve, Wenna! approve of such a man, and such a loveless, joyless prospect! Never!" she exclaimed, bitterly.

"Then you mean to refuse him? What does papa say to that?" was the next remark of the younger girl.

Gladys shook her head mournfully.

"Wenna, I believe I ought to do it. I believe that it would have been more brave and more true if I had persisted in an absolute and final refusal. But I had not courage at the moment, and, besides, it is perhaps only due to papa for me to try, at any rate, to please him."

Wenna gave an involuntary laugh that had something scornful in it.

"Well, you are very different to me, Gladys. I should know at once what to do and whether I preferred to have a rich husband to an unromantic

quarrel with my father when I had no lover to fall back upon. Now, if you were in love, or partly engaged, or anything of that kind, it would be totally different. There might be some fun in that, but, so far as I know, there is nothing of that kind in the way, is there, my eldest sister?" she went on, half archly, half questioningly, her eyes fixed on Gladys as she spoke, with an eager, penetrating glance.

"No, and you know it. Why torment me with any such nonsense, Wenna?" Gladys said, impetuously.

"Simply because if that is the case, and you have no idea what that wonderful myth, Love, may be—I should decidedly go in for wealth and your suitor," returned the younger girl, carelessly. "Do you not know, Gladys, that the property of our very strong-willed father goes with the title to Cecil or any lucky masculine heir, and that you and I shall have to take the crumbs that fall from his table—or, in other words, the savings of our father and the fortune of our mother, for our pittance? And I rather suspect that the amount will not be at all a compensation for the forty thousand a year and handsome pin money and settlements for which I should certainly stand out if I were you, Gladys," she continued, playing with a pen as she spoke, and tapping it on the table at each forcible word of her advice.

"If I do take him, it would certainly only be on one condition, but not such as you think, Wenna," replied her sister, with a firmer manner than she had yet maintained. "However, I have time before me to think and decide. I have asked till Christmas, and then it will be for me to make my decision."

"Till Christmas? and papa allowed it?" exclaimed Wenna, in surprise.

"He had no choice—so far I was firm," answered Gladys, gravely.

"Then—well, the woman who hesitates is lost, they say," replied Wenna. "I think I may congratulate you as the future mistress of the Larches. For me, I mean to play a bold game, Gladys, and if there is a richer and older bridegroom to be found we will be married the same day and be widows in Heaven's good time. So now I will go on with these 'Songs of Tuscany' and leave you to your meditations."

(To be continued.)

OLD RUFFORD'S MONEY; OR, WON WITHOUT MERIT, LOST WITHOUT DESERVING.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"Fighting for Freedom," etc., etc.

CHAPTER LI.

"AND so you have not heard any tidings of Mister Harvey, the commercial gent, who lodged with you about a month ago? Well, that is very curious, Mrs. Goodbody, very curious indeed," said Mr. Lynx, who, in the resumed character of Mr. Puddicombe, the toy-dealer and hardwareman, of Tunbridge Wells, was taking a cup of tea with that notable housewife. "I should like to see your husband before I make a little disclosure about that Mister Harvey which I should like him also to hear."

"Oh, for that matter, Mr. Puddicombe, Goodbody and I have no secrets between us—none whatsoever. I never lets him have any. It wouldn't be lucky for him if he had. So if it's anything to tell him, and time's of consequence to you, why, it's all the same to tell it to me, as he must take my advice in home matters after all."

"Just so, Mrs. Goodbody, you're perfectly right; but, though you mayn't think it, I'm in the law myself, leastwise connected with it; and we always look to the husband as responsible, yes, responsible even for the wife's actions, which are supposed to be under the husband's influence and control—"

"Which they ain't if a wife known her duty and her place, Mr. Puddicombe, and has sense, which her husband seldom has, worse luck, leastways my Dan'l isn't much troubled with that sort of thing—"

"I speak merely of the law, Mrs. Goodbody, and of what are called 'legal fictions,' one of which is—"

"Jest so, Mr. Pudding'em, and it is fiction, whether it's legal or no, as says a woman can't do no wrong without her husband telling her or making of her do it; but what I says in this matter is, that if so be you have anything to say for or agen Mister Harvey, why, I'm the person to say it to, and nobody else."

"Well, then, Mrs. Goodbody, I may as well lose no more time."

And Mr. Lynx stepped to the front door, which, by-the-bye, was only two steps from where he was sitting.

What was Mrs. Goodbody's surprise when, looking after her gentlemanly visitor, she perceived him look up the street and beckon with his forefinger, which motion was almost instantaneously followed by the heavy and unmistakeable tramp of four pair of iron-shod police-boots on the narrow pavement, the said boots being on the feet of a sergeant and three of the P.C.'s, clad in heavy greatcoats, wearing duty wristlets, and, as Mr. Dan'l Goodbody, who was just turning into the street, described them, "in full marching order."

Mr. Lynx's movements became still more extraordinary—so much so that the valuable Mrs. Goodbody was for a few minutes, but only for a few minutes, dumbfounded.

"Sergeant Whistler," said he, "detail one of your constables to the rear of the house; station one at the door, and leave the third disposable. You and I will search the house and premises. I presume, Mrs. Goodbody," said he, turning blandly to that astounded female, "that you have not removed any of Mr. Harvey's goods since I slept there that night?"

"No, I haven't, nor I shan't let nobody else move them neyther. There's two weeks' rent due to me on 'em, and I desies anybody to touch 'em, 'cept Mr. Harvey, until I'm satisfied of my rent, and perhaps I wouldn't let him unles—"

"My dear woman," interposed Mr. Lynx, "don't ruffle yourself. There's no occasion—"

"No occasion?" screamed Mrs. Goodbody, "no occasion, when a honest person's house is bust into by a lot of perlees as if it was a den of robbers—no occasion, when a stranger comes and says as he'll carry off my lodger's goods as there is rent due to me upon?—No occasion, did you say, Mr. Buddicombe, when—"

"Oh, here's Mr. Goodbody himself," said Mr. Lynx, not heeding the objurgatory landlady. "I've something to say to you, Mr. Goodbody—"

"Say it to me then, and I'll answer you," ejaculated the now irate Mrs. Goodbody.

Poor Dan'l Goodbody could not find his tongue.

"Mr. Goodbody," continued Mr. Lynx, "I have come to your house with a search-warrant from London for a notorious criminal, forger and thief, and I mean to carry out my duty—quietly if I can, but at any rate to carry it out. Now, if you can't prevent this woman from obstructing us, I shall be compelled to send her in custody to the station, which I should be sorry to do."

While Mr. Lynx thus spoke the stalwart sergeant, who was well known to Mrs. Goodbody, had drawn near that lady, and, taking her with rustic politeness near the arm, had whispered her thus:

"You'd better be quiet, mother; there's no use in resisting of the law. This here's a great nob in the Lunnon police, and he's got proof as your lodger was a goin' to rob the mail of a hundred thousand pounds weight in gold, or summater in that way. So if you don't want to be dragged into it and shoved in the county jail, you'll jest keep your breath to cool your gruel, 'cos you'll want it if you don't, I can tell 'ee."

Mrs. Goodbody was overwhelmed. That nice, gentlemanly Mr. Harvey a thief! and going to rob the mail of all the gold going to the Bank of England to make the sovereigns!

She retreated into her front parlour, enveloped her face in her coarse apron plunged into a rush-bottomed chair, and began such a lusty boo-hooing as sent Mr. Lynx and the rural sergeant laughing into the back yard.

What they found there the reader already knows. The sergeant, by direction of Mr. Lynx, shouldered the big packing-case and its contents, and conveyed them straight to the station.

Mr. Lynx slipped into the back parlour, or bedroom, and possessed himself of the little black bag of burglar's apparatus, then, calling off his men, that gentlemanly detective bade the sheepish Dan'l Goodbody and his now utterly flabbergasted better-half a most formal and polite "Good evening," leaving the farther watching of the premises to a crowd of town idlers assembled from all parts, and a mob of juvenile tatterdemalions.

These last, staying later about the front of the house after Mrs. Goodbody had recovered her presence of mind than that lady considered the unpleasant occurrence warranted, had been several times warned by her to disperse.

They treated these threats with contempt, in some cases with derision, until the trauculent and impatient victim of their annoyance resorted to what she called "reading the riot act," said "reading" being the discharge among them and over them of a very large paifal of the dirtiest house-shops she could collect.

This exploit not only involved the spoiling of an innocent small boy's clothes, said small boy being, as in all such cases, perfectly "innocent," but it

brought out his enraged Irish mother to redress her child's wrongs.

Here came a furious war of words, lasting for nearly an hour, when the belligerent parties would certainly have come to scratchings and blows but for the timely interference of the "disposable" policeman, who "ran in" Mother Ballyrag to her lodgings, while Dan'l, by the policeman's promptings, mustered courage to condemn "his missus for wasting her words on such cattle," and yet more, to exert his marital authority by hauling her backwards within doors by her gowm and petticoats, she, from exhaustion, partly consenting to this gentle violence.

The row now subsided, and the eldest Goodbody having fetched a quartet of rum from the "Pig and Whistle," which Dan'l paid for from his private purse, Mrs. Goodbody consented to be pacified, drank three-fourths of it, and in ten minutes thereafter, to the great content of Dan'l, was, as he expressed it, "driving her pigs to market sweet as any baby in Chris' endom."

We have said that Mr. Lynx had ascertained, so far as negative proof could be had, that Mr. Ephraim Ferrett had not left English ground via Dover, and he also decided, after a mature consideration of the circumstances attending Joe Paget's interview with Ephraim on his last night there, and subsequent occurrences, that Ferrett had not returned to London. He had further found that Ferrett knew of the letter, he, Lynx, had detected on the person of Barney Cross, now lying condemned to death for the Frimley murder. Another great link in the evidence against Ferrett was also supplied by his identification as the writer of that letter, which was directly connected with the contemplated mail robbery.

Mr. Lynx's next inference was that Ephraim had fled the country, perhaps for America via Liverpool. This, however, he rejected for several reasons unnecessary to enumerate.

Southampton and St. Malo or Guernsey? No. Weymouth and the Channel Island? Not so probable as Folkestone and Boulogne. He again and again reverted to this route.

"That's it," concluded he; "it's a handy distance—more five-mile walk along the coast. Perhaps he did it that very night, and in the morning away across Channel for a few shillings. Ephraim loves money, and there he is in an English town among plenty of English rogues of the same kidney. Boulogne's my point this time."

Next morning, after a few sterile inquiries of the local police, Mr. Lynx was on the deck of the tidal packet, and in the afternoon he had recognized and chatted with half a dozen London acquaintances in the Rue de l'Ecu, peeped into a salon de jeu or two in the Haute Ville, visited the Vauxhall de Capucine where there was a winter concert, and gleaned some information which led him to believe that Ephraim had really passed through Boulogne, and thence—why, his first point would be Paris. To Paris, then, Mr. Lynx made his way.

The third day, after his sojourn, and after several conferences with the police, close scrutinies of the visitors' books at certain inferior hotels, and an examination of passports and visits at the bureaux, Mr. Lynx was wandering down the Rue St. Dominique, near the caserne.

Turning towards the Rue de Grenelle, in that yet un-Haussmannized quarter of Paris, he espied a small black board over a rather mean doorway, bearing a somewhat peculiar inscription.

It ran thus:

"Cercle de Sport. Ici on parle sur ou contre chevaux. Tous les 'odds,' sur le prix varie."

A printed paper, also in very English-French, in the window, informed the passer-by that:

"Ici on peut consulter les Listes Diurnes; Le Livre des Haras, Le Stud Book, Le Racing Calendar, et tous les autres publications des Jockey-clubs de la France, l'Angleterre, et d'Allemagne."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Lynx, reflectively, after seriously digesting these and some other similar inscriptions.

He looked yet more closely into the dim little window, wherein lay a small, sourvily printed slip, headed, "Odds sur le Derby et le Grand Prix de Paris."

"I think I'll stop in and put on a five-franc piece, or perhaps half a napoleon. It mayn't be a bad investment. If they don't know Ephraim here, I should say he would find them out by instinct."

Mr. Lynx walked in.

A clerk at the desk looked up, and asked, in French:

"What would mosso like to back?"

"You speak English?" returned Lynx.

"Oh, certaineess; ve spake de English. If mosso would like to ve the English clerk?"

And the Frenchman disappeared behind a green-baize screen.

An old acquaintance of Mr. Lynx's immediately emerged, but as he did not immediately look up,

and apparently busied himself with something the outgoing person had scribbled on a piece of paper and left on the pad, he did not recognize Mr. Lynx.

That gentleman too, instead of striking an attitude of surprise, and exclaiming, like young Hamlet, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" merely put himself in a "questionable shape" by pulling up his cravat and pulling down the brim of his soft beaver, while he inquired, in a feigned voice, "the price of Chourineur for the Prix de l'Impératrice?"

"Ah, sir, I'm afeard we're quite full agin' the stabber," replied the Englishman. "But if so be you'd take a few p'ints less than market, say sevens, we might do business—to how much, sir, did you wish to back the hoss?"

"To half a nap.—I'm only backing my fancy," said Mr. Lynx, carelessly.

"At sevens?" said the man, writing on a small, bilious-looking bit of cardboard like a pawnbroker's ticket.

Then, turning to Mr. Lynx, he held out the voucher with his left hand, and opened his right for the golden deposit.

Mr. Lynx looked full at the man, who, in return, certainly stared fixedly at him.

He did not, however, take the coin, which, sooth to say, Mr. Lynx held just out of his reach. The man slowly laid down the ticket on the desk.

Mr. Lynx smiled and nodded familiarly.

"There's nothing, Mr. Lynx, that will touch me here," said the man, finding his speech; "so I don't see the fun of trying to frighten a chap in this way, when he's a-trying to pick up a honest crumb in a furrin' country; and very small crumbs they are, I can tell you."

Mr. Lynx laughed, but it was not a pleasant laugh.

"Why, Bill Bonnet, you don't think that a little Welshing is game enough to bring me over the salt water to cop a man? I'm only glad to find you're so well, and favouring our 'natural enemies,' as they used to call 'em, with the advantage of your talents. I'm not going to interfere with your little game, I assure you."

"It is but a little game, I can tell you," said Bill Bonnet, lugubriously; "why, bless you, these Frenchmen are worse nor Jews. They always think you're a-cheatin' on 'em, so there's no credit in acting square. They've no pluck in betting, and alays expect to win; and whenever they loses don't they holler, nayther. I on'y wish I could get back safe across the herring-pond, Mr. Lynx—I could alays do business in England, but it's no go here, as I've found to my cost, and so has many others."

"Can't you shut up shop," asked Lynx, "it's a nasty evening, and no business doing—and step round to the café in the Rue des Vieux Cordeliers? That's where I'm staying on a little business just now, and if you can help me there'll be a something handsome hanging to it, I can tell you."

The man readily assented. He first shut the book, then took a common key from a shelf, locked a door which led into a back-room whereby the Frenchman had made his exit, and then, desiring Mr. Lynx to go out into the street, turned out the stumpy argand oil-lamp which was the sole light of the "Grand Cercle de Sport."

"My governot," said he, "has gone out the back way into the Allée des Fêves, he seldom goes into the front street, for reasons of his own."

The man drew to the street door, which had a spring lock opened by a key from the outside, and the twain soon made their way to the Rue des Vieux Cordeliers.

Lynx called for a couple of "canons," and at once opened business.

"I told you, Bill, that I had a little job in hand which might bring grist to the mill if you helped to work it right."

"I'm sure, Mr. Lynx, that if there's a quid to be earned I never did hang back, but this here turf agency, or commission, and percentage on winnings, is about the starvationest game in Paris as I've ever heard of. If you could only put a chap up to any dodge as would pay, I'd stand a handsome percentage myself, instead of asking it from 'noble sportamen' as knows no more about sporting nor a work'n' gal."

"Bill Bonnet, you were always a grumbler. Bad workmen find fault with their tools; your tools are flats, but as you don't know how to handle 'em cleverly they turn sharp edge on and cut you—ha! ha!"

Mr. Bonnet did not quite understand Mr. Lynx's observation, but he knew it was the reverse of complimentary, and trimmed his course accordingly.

"Well, we can't all have our nuts screwed on so square as yours, Mr. Lynx, else there'd be no chance for the clever ones; but if you can put me on to anything as—"

"I can and will," returned Lynx. "You know Paris well, I suppose?"

"That's more nor a supposition, Mr. Lynx; I know every rue and ruelle, every grévier, maréchal, halle, hospice, hotel, and abattoir, all the mousées, cabinets, circuses, cimetières, catacombes, casernes, cabarets, and guinguettes, besides dozens of other queer places and siennes as would make a St. Giles's cadger hold up his hands with astonishment. Yes, there's some queer things and queer places to be seen in Paris, Mr. Lynx, as beats Lunnon hollow for dirt, desperate characters, and all sorts o' filth and rascality."

"I'm glad you're so well up in your guide-book, Mr. Bonnet; it may be of use to you. Among your latest fashionable arrivals, as the papers say, have you any note in your mind of one Bowman—Edmund Bowman, attorney-at-law, alias Blacksheep Bowman, otherwise Ephraim Ferrett? Because if you have there's a fiver for you so soon as you put me on his track, and it may be, if you've anything worth giving evidence on, I may make your coming back over the sprat ditch easier than you expect."

Bill Bonnet brightened up.

"Blacksheep Bowman! Why, he's my master, the nigger. Leastways, he's a partner in the firm as pays me a percentage on next to nothing a week and find myself. Why, he hadn't left that blessed crib, cabinet, or 'circle,' he calls it, ten minutes, and swept out the ten francs as was one whole day's swindle, leaving me one on 'em, just tenpence, for my day's work, when you stepped in. That Frenchman you see is his partner. He's what they call a freed forçat, something like our ticket-o'-leave-man. He has to go up to the police every month and be identified and report himself, so he don't like walking on the sunshiny side o' the way. But that police spying is all boosh, so as you ain't mixed up with politics, or trades-unions, or Mary Ann societies, or the like. 'Cepting them things, the police don't care what a man does."

"And where does Mr. Bowman live when he's at home?"

"That's just what he don't let me know, but I do know the house where he uses, and I desay his hotel might be found out. I owes him no service, the mangy old nigger driver; as I told him this very evening, I can't live on: tenpence a day, and hopes of Longchamps, and Chantilly, and the Bois, and fill my belly with promises o' sunshine, so he shoots the sack at me."

"And you shall put him into it, hal! hal! Toss off your 'canon,' my hero, there's more where that came from. Let us have a double omelette—fine herbs and bacon, garçon, and some absinthe, and a couple of Manillas, d'ye hear?"

The absinthe and a carafe of water were brought, and a bubble and hiss soon told that the bacon-omelette was in preparation.

"It's eight o'clock and past, Bill," said Mr. Lynx; "we'll have our suppers, and then take a walk in the direction of—Where did you say our man frequented—what cafe?"

"It's a crib near the Passage des Petites Ecuries, just after you've passed the Rue d'Enghien on the left. They take in letters for him there as Monsieur Boulanger. There's a table upstairs and a little quiet play of an evening, so it's hard to get in if you're a stranger, unless you're introduced."

"But you are known?"

"Of course."

"Then that will do. What need of their knowing more? You just mark him down, Bill Bonnet, pot him as soon as ever he tries to take wing. Why, Bill Bonnet, you're a made man! Have another omelette?"

Bill was evidently sharp set.

"You can eat a double?"

Bill did not say no.

"Another double omelette, garçon. What time did you say was most likely to find the old cook at perch?"

"Not much before ten."

"Good; we'll be there. Garçon, a demi-bouteille de Macon."

At a few minutes to ten Mr. Lynx and the now loquacious Bill Bonnet were en route for the cabaret near the Passage des Petites Ecuries.

Arrived in front of a mean, dilapidated, overhanging old house, above the dark doorway of which swang a dirty, red-coloured, smoky lamp, and through the thick yellow window blinds of which the light from the rooms within was only visible to a careful observer, Bill Bonnet intimated that this was the Hotel Ferrett.

"And a very nice hotel it is," said Mr. Lynx, facetiously. "Now, Bill, it depends on yourself whether you pocket this fiver to-night or leave it to the chapter of accidents."

Bill was full of Dutch courage, and declared his readiness to earn the guerdon on the spot, if possible.

"Then stand here two minutes," said Mr. Lynx, "and watch that he does not escape. You say he is in the house?"

Bill went to the lowermost window, peeped in.

He then walked three steps within the doorway, and returned.

"Yes; he's there."

Mr. Lynx went and quickly returned with a sergeant de ville, to whom he had shown his authority, backed by the French bureau de police.

Bill Bonnet stood at a respectful distance from the officer.

"Come here," said Mr. Lynx. "This is my man."

The sergeant bowed.

"A votre service, monsieur."

"This is what you must do," said Mr. Lynx to "his man" as he called him. "Go into the cabaret, with this letter in your hand—they know you—and say that Mossoo—what's the name of his partner Mossoo—"

"Gringolet, that's the nickname he goes by," said Bill Bonnet.

"Gringolet?" asked the sergeant, eagerly; "je sais le porteur de ce nom-là."

Mr. Lynx laughed, and explained that it was not Monsieur Gringolet he wanted, but he was merely using his name as a decoy for the man named in the warrant.

"Well, then," he continued, "you'll say that Mossoo Gringolet awaits to see Mossoo Bullanjoer at the corner on urgent business."

"He'll come with me you'll see; I shall need no letter."

"Very well."

Bill Bonnet entered the house; the thief-taker and his French confères slunk into a dark doorway, and in a few seconds out walked the astute and cunning Mr. Ephraim Ferrett, as unsuspecting as a green goose of the knife and kitchen fire and of sage and onions by and with which he is destined to be killed, cooked and eaten.

Mr. Lynx could hardly believe that such a simple pinch of salt could have been sprinkled on the tail of such a wideawake old town sparrow as Ephraim Ferrett.

But so it was. It was his "manifest destiny," his unguarded moment, and there marched old Heynard, the fox, into the simplest decoy that ever caught a wild duck or dotterell.

A dozen yards farther down the street and the Gallin sergeant de ville had caught the right wrist of Ephraim from behind, while Mr. Lynx, passing between his man and Bill Bonnet, had as cleverly clutched hold of the left.

"Murder!" cried Ephraim. "Rescue! Rescue me, Bill! Bill Bonnet! a rescue!"

But Bill Bonnet stirred not.

"This way, mossoo, this way," said Mr. Lynx, leading his prisoner up to the nearest suspended street lamp, to make sure of his identity. "Ah, bonsoir, mon cher Mossoo Boulanger—I think your batch is rather overbrowned this time!"

As he spoke, the sergeant lending his aid, the bright English handcuffs were slipt and locked on to Ephraim's wrists.

A groan burst from his trembling lips as he recognized the voice and features of his old aversion and terror—Lionel Lynx, the detective!

We have said that Mr. Lynx had the suaviter in modo as well as fortiter in re. With the exception of this one little joke we have just recorded his behaviour to the unhappy Ephraim was now deferentially polite, without for an instant relaxing his vigilance.

Calling a fiacre, and desiring Bill Bonnet to await his return at the café in the Rue des Vieux Cordeliers, Mr. Lynx with the sergeant and his captive drove off to where we will leave the arch-villain in safe durance awaiting his trajet to the British metropolis.

CHAPTER LII.

THERE was mighty commotion on the morning of which we write in the family party assembled in Eaton Square.

Ralph Cheterton and Cecilia, Captain Sherlock, Mrs. Hartwell, and Squire Frankland had just finished breakfast.

It was the morning of the first day of the Sessions of the Central Criminal Court; that day the grand jury would receive their charge from the Recorder of London, and among the "bills" to be "found" or "thrown out" by them was one containing several "counts" of felony against Reginald Cheterton.

Sad, solemn and silent had been that meal.

William Sherlock had promised to attend at the court in the Old Bailey at twelve o'clock, and to return thence with the tidings, for good or for evil, of the "flinging" or "throwing out" of the "presentation" to the grand jury of Middlesex.

The morning mail had come in, but there had been no letter for three days from Paris, by which means Mr. Lynx had hitherto kept them au courant of so much of his movements and intentions as he had thought fit to communicate. Hope of deliverance from that quarter had indeed well nigh died

out when a hansom whirled up to the door and a double knock mighty as if two double-knocked postmen had united their strength in announcing the delivery of what Tom Hood called "a double-letter from Dublin," echoed not only through the hall but up the broad staircase, and reverberated on the tympanum of every one of the grief-struck party.

Each looked at the other with a mixed presentiment of hope and fear. All felt that such a portentous occasion must relate to the one subject of all their thoughts.

They were not left long in suspense.

Mr. Fitzpius threw the door of the breakfast-room wide open with a broad grin on his impudent face. He instinctively knew that the travel-stained Mr. Lynx who immediately entered was the bearer of glad tidings, and he waited, as he thought himself entitled to do, for his share of the intelligence then brought to his master.

Mr. Lynx bowed himself in.

"Night and day in my boots, squire, must be my excuse to the lady for presenting myself in this state," said Mr. Lynx; "but I haven't stopped to bait since we left Paris—I and my prisoner—Ephraim Forrett—"

The squire could not restrain himself. He rushed up to Lynx and caught his hand with so hearty a grip that he had in his turn to apologize. Captain Sherlock too ranged up alongside of the officer, while poor Cecilia, who had so heroically upheld herself after the first discovery of the dreadful facts, swooned outright with the revelation of joy, sank upon a sofa, and called for all the care of her really alarmed father.

The squire, however, having his back turned, did not see this little episode, so taken up was he with the entry of the bearer of the news.

"You've got the rascal, then? got him at last?"

"Safe as patent locks, iron doors, stone walls and turnkeys can keep him," replied Mr. Lynx, with pardonable exultation in his tone. "I promised you I would have him, if above ground, and I have kept my promise."

"And I also have a promise to keep," said the squire. "I forget whether I made it to you, Mr. Lynx, but I made it to myself. It was to double the reward I first offered. Mr. Lynx, I am your debtor for two hundred pounds—"

Cecilia had partially revived, and Ralph Chesterton now came forward.

"Nay, Cousin Babbhy, that I will not allow. In all friendship, I tell you, you shall not have the credit of rewarding this able man, whom I look upon, under Providence, as the saviour of my son from disgrace and worse than death. It is I who must pay the reward."

"Upon my word, Cousin Ralph," said the good-humoured squire, "I'm so happy just now that I mightn't quarrel with anybody, else you and I might have a little breeze about who should pay this little sum. Bleas me! why, what's the matter with my own—my dearest—I beg pardon, my Cecilia, and Squire Frankland hastened to the sofa, where lay Cecilia Chesterton, pale as monumental marble, but now perfectly conscious of what was passing around her.

This little distraction enabled Ralph Chesterton to arrange with Mr. Lynx for the payment of the reward, and also left him open to the questioning of William Sherlock.

To him and to Ralph Chesterton, with a not inattentive listener in good Mrs. Hartwell, Mr. Lynx detailed the particulars of his journey to France and its perfect success.

In return he learned from William Sherlock the fact that that very day the bill of indictment was preferred.

"There's no help for it, I'm afraid," said Mr. Lynx; "there's no time for an examination and the perfecting of depositions, which will take a couple of hearings. Besides, sir, there's much yet to do. There's Joe Paget to be brought up against him, and I've many inquiries to make, likely a search or two. I must also have Joe Paget with me for several things."

"But can't we prevent this finding of a true bill, as they call it? I'll see Sergeant Wilkins—"

"Neither he nor anybody else can stop the regular course of things at so short a notice. Besides, it's only a matter of form. The trial can be put off easily enough on affidavits till after we've dealt with Mr. Forrett, whose case I haven't half got up as yet."

William Sherlock felt that Lynx was right. He went down to the court, and when he returned with the intelligence that a "true bill" had been found, and the case set down for trial at the present sessions, no one seemed to care one iota about the Grand Jury, or any other jury for that matter, so convinced did every one feel that the grand point for the exculpation of Reginald and the punishment of the real offender was attained by the capture of Ephraim Forrett.

"You don't think that Israel Fagin will be found in Sharp's Alley, nor Field Lane, why not?"

"Because I know he took fright when I was nailed at Dover, and when I went to his crib the night after I was cleaned out in the Mint I see his son Reuben, and he told me as the old man had gone abroad, to Germany somewhere, Hamburg it was; and when I went to Field Lane the night after that the crib was shut up and all the family gone."

"Uml!" said Mr. Lynx, "I'm not so sure of that. Well, I can do without him this journey, Joe, and it's no use overburdening a case. I shall be sure to want him in some other matter, so I'll put this on the shelf till then. But I shall want you, Joe, to come with me and show me this Chick Lane lodging. Did you say that Forrett kept it on?"

"He did when I last saw him."

"Good. We'll search that place, Joe, this very night."

"That's the ticket, Joe," chimed in the delighted Benjamin Bridoon, in whose Brompton parlour—Mr. Lynx was not, under such pleasant circumstances, a kitchen-guest—the above conversation passed. "I don't see no reason why I shouldn't make one in the search, mister."

"Beg pardon," interposed Mr. Lynx; "but I do. It isn't at all regular. I hold the warrant and have charge of the case for the commissioners of police, and it is my business, Mr. Bridoon, to collect the evidence and lay it before the magistrate; so I cannot permit any interference. I am acting professionally in the matter, and cannot allow any amateur assistance. I dare say, Mr. Bridoon, you will be called on as a witness, and I heard the squire say he thought you should be rewarded for your trouble, but—"

Mr. Bridoon fired up.

"Reward be —, Mr. Lynx; I'm no professional man-hunter. I don't kidnap men for blood money. What do you mean by you won't allow me to interfere? Where would you have been, clever as you think yourself, if I hadn't picked up Joe Paget, here?"

Mr. Lynx saw the sort of man he had to deal with, and though cool and courageous he always possessed that "better part of valour—desertion." He at once presented a conductor to Mr. Bridoon's thunder-cloud, and the fire ran harmlessly into the ground.

"Upon my word, Mr. Bridoon, you entirely misunderstand me. I merely said, while admitting your title to reward, or praise, if you like that better, that mine was professional service, always at command of the public, and my only means of living. Of course you have no authority, not even that of a special constable, to apprehend any one, and therefore I think you will admit that your presence in a difficult and delicate secret like that in which I am engaged, and in which I seek Mr. Paget's assistance, might be very mischievous and might defeat the object we all have in view. As to the hard things you said about—"

"Oh, never mind them, I'll take them back," said the placable pugilistic Ben Bridoon; "I'll take all that back, I say. I was only thinking I might lend a hand if anything ugly turned up in them queer slums. All I want is, as you know, to convict that rascally Blacksheep Bowmen."

Mr. Lynx and the horse-faced shock hands and the conversation resumed its friendly tone.

The evening set in and Mr. Lynx and Joe Paget set out for the squalid slums, narrow, fetid alleys, and crowded courts, fociuses of crime and panperon, social and physical pestilences, which covered the ground now lying waste, or better occupied by new buildings, lofty warehouses, railway stations, a "City Temple," printing-offices, markets, manufacturers, schools, chapels, the broad Farringdon Road and the well-paved and airy lateral streets adjacent to the Holborn Viaduct.

Mr. Lynx decided against entering the unsavoury region by the narrow strait of Field Lane, so they made a détour, crossed Gray's Inn Lane into Liquorpond Street, threaded the fish and vegetable stalls of Leather Lane, and, passing through Charles and Kirby Streets, Hoxton Garden, reached the centre of the thieves' citadel by ways which though mean and dirty were their principally tenanted by Italian pedrone and organ grinders, white mice, and tortoise boys, and the manufacturers and hawkers of weather glasses, thermometers, magnets, hand-mirrors, small telescopes, magic lanterns, camera-obscuras, and other philosophical instruments and toys, in which the very dirty children of the sunny South claimed a monopoly and had here established a peculiar colony.

Leaving the foot of Kirby Street, they plunged into a labyrinth of courts and alleys, and, turning to the right, quickly debouched upon the renowned Chick Lane, subsequently elevated to the dignity of Cowcross Street, but now among "the things before the flood."

The tenement on the third floor of which dwelt the wily Ephraim we have already described. Lynx and Joe, or rather Joe and Lynx, for the former led the way up the narrow, creaking stairs, entered and ascended without observation. The door on the landing was of strong, rough planks, with three broad crosspieces, and the lock, which was inside, might have served at some time for a pair of coach-gates.

Lynx struck a light with a silent match and held up the little wax-taper of his slide-lantern.

"It's a caution that door," said Joe. "I remember old Eph laughing at it in his queer way when I brought him here after his Welshing smash, and he, as he said, took 'a lease of t.e. crib, cos he faced it."

"He'll have a longer lease, Joe, of a crib with a very much stronger door than this made over to him gratis if you and I can do him that service. It won't do to make a row cracking this crib. What's the fastening inside like?"

"A jolly big square staple in the thick doorpost. But stop, Mr. Lynx, now I think on it it may be looked at all. Joe applied his eye to the crack, a good wide one between the jamb and front edge of the stout door. "No more it is," added he. "There's only one jolly big bolt, and here's the nick in the post where the bit o' cover comes out as conceals the knot of the string as draws it back."

As Joe said this, to the great satisfaction of Mr. Lynx, he drew out a strong back-knife-handled jack-knife, prised from its bed an oblong piece of wood usually fitted into a groove, picked out a knotted piece of strong string from the cavity, and, with a cry of "There he goes!" back went the bolt with a harsh, grating sound, and the ponderous door swung inwards.

The musty-smelling chamber was dark and tenebrous. The bull's-eye reflector glanced like the searching eye of some inquisitive Polyphemus round the grimy, damp and smoke-discoloured walls, with a weird glare; and Joe, who was not without some superstitious qualms, almost expected to see some ghostly spectre, some blood-spattered corpse, or even the Mephistophelean countenance of Ephraim Forrett himself grinning out of the blackness.

Mr. Lynx had no such weakness. He followed his guiding bull's-eye and walked in, examining every cranny and cupboard and nook, and after a few seconds Joe found him still exploring. Like Don Alfonso and his myrmidons:

Under the bed they looked, and there they found—

No matter what, it was not that they sought.

But, unlike Donna Inez's jealous lord, they did find what they were looking for, and in this wise.

Joe had full knowledge of the old-fashioned and well-worn leather writing-case wherby Ephraim set such store. It was a stout and labyrinthine receptacle, rigid at one end, with a travelling-desk or slope, and of wondrous expanding capacity, by means of manifold tuck-pockets, which, when full, made it a load for a small "carry-your-parcel-air" to shoulder, and at other times was so lean and thin that Eph had been known to button it under his loose Chesterfield, when it looked like nothing more than a boy's copybook up his back to desider the master's cane.

The case Joe had always looked upon with a sort of ignorant awe—a verification of the "omne ignotum pro magnifico" of Horace—whom neither he nor Lynx knew anything about.

The latter was the exception which proves this rule, for he felt nothing like respect for the rascal's secret repertory. This writing-case Joe pointed out on a high shelf. Lynx mounted a rickety chair he had placed against the wall, while Joe held it steadily, and down came the prize.

(To be continued.)

HOW WE FELL OUT.

"Oh, dear!"

I looked up, in surprise, to bear such a doleful sound from Mary's lips.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "You aren't ill, are you?"

"Worse than that," answered Mary, with a laugh that hadn't much of a merry sound in it. "Just look up the road."

I went to the window and looked out. It was my turn to say "Oh, dear!" then.

A chair was coming down the hill with a man and woman and two children in it.

"I wish I had known they were coming," said Mary, beginning to gather up her work, and shutting every drawer about the sewing-machine. "I could have picked up things and put them out of the way."

"Picking up things," and "putting them out of the way," was a performance regularly gone through with every time Mr. and Mrs. Mason visited us. Such children as theirs were I never had seen before; and I always sat up a silent invocation, as they climbed into the chaise preparatory to taking their departure, that I might never see their like again. Nothing was safe that they could lay their hands on. I might shake my head, and suggest as forcibly as I dared to that they should let things alone, but in vain. They hadn't the faintest idea of minding a word I said; and I think neither Mr. nor Mrs. Mason ever had any intention of supplementing my attempts at a sort of declaration of independence by an exhibition of parental authority.

"I'd like to see Lucy well enough," said Mary, with a little premonitory shiver of dread, "but those horrid children! It's enough to make a saint lose his patience to have them about. How long, do you suppose, they'll stay?"

"Two or three days," said I, laughing.

"Oh, goodness! I hope not!" exclaimed Mary. "You'd better begin to pick up things in the parlour."

All this time she had been flying about the sitting-room, gathering up books, and papers, and everything that happened to be comfortably portable, and putting them up out of reach.

I fastened the doors opening between the sitting-room and my pleasant little conservatory, and took myself off to begin operations in the parlour, just as the chaise drove up to the gate.

I picked up all my music, put it on the highest shelf of the whatnot, and closed the organ. Then began a general gathering up of the numberless little knick-knacks which I had collected. The stereoscope and views I put on the mantelpiece, and stashed them with the card-basket, and the last few books I hid in the chess-board, out of sight, and covered up the clock with a newspaper.

"John Henry" was eight and "Georgy" was six. Their parents had an idea that they were marvels of youthful smartness and humoured them accordingly. The consequence was, of course, that they were two young despots.

"Where's the stone girl?" demanded John Henry, immediately.

The "stone girl" was a little bust of Clytie that he had seen on a previous visit and taken a great fancy to.

"I put it up," said I. "I was afraid it would get broken."

"I want it," said John Henry. "Give it for me."

"You can't have it," I replied. "You'll break it."

"No, I won't, muther," declared John Henry.

"Well, you can't have it, and that settles the matter," answered I.

Whereupon John Henry, in a fit of the sulks, for which he had a natural aptitude if things didn't move to suit him, jerked himself out of the parlour to "tell me."

I looked about to see what had become of Georgy. He had dragged down a book from a hanging-shelf and was rumpling over the leaves at a fearful rate.

"You mustn't take down the books," I said, going up to him.

What was my dismay when I saw what he had done! The volume he had captured was a beautiful copy of Bryant's "Library of Poetry and Song," and had been presented to me by a friend. There was nothing in the library that I valued more highly.

"How do you do?" said Lucy, as I came in. "You don't look as if you felt well!"

"I don't very," answered I. "I feel as if I were going to have fits."

"Fits!" exclaimed Lucy, aghast. "Ain't they catching? What if the boys should get 'em?"

I mentally concluded that "the boys" would be in danger of my "giving them fits" if they didn't behave themselves. Mary explained that there wasn't much danger of contracting any disease, and Lucy breathed more freely.

I sat down to chat awhile with Lucy. I was interrupted by one of Mary's peculiar coughs. Whenever I heard them I knew that they were signals of "danger ahead." I looked up towards her, and she motioned towards the conservatory. I was on the alert in a moment. I could stand almost anything better than having my flowers meddled with.

John Henry had crawled in, and was breaking off some lovely clusters of oleander blossoms.

I was now very angry. I sprang up, utterly careless of what Lucy might think about it, opened the door, seized John Henry by the arm and jerked him into the sitting-room in a twinkling.

"The child is so fond of flowers," said Lucy, smiling. "Let him have a bunch to amuse him."

"I don't grow flowers for that purpose," I an-

swered, curtly. "John Henry, you must not go in there again."

I could see that Lucy was offended, but I didn't care. I told Mary so, when we got a chance to exchange a few words of condolence.

"If people go a visiting with such ill-behaved children as Lucy's are, and don't try to make them mind, and keep out of mischief, they can't blame other people for acting on the defensive. If she won't see to them, I will. I won't sit down, and let them destroy everything without saying a word."

"I don't blame you," said Mary, "I wish—Oh, dear!" and with her sentence cut short at the beginning by this exclamation, she made a raid on John Henry, who had got the kitten, and had tied a string about its neck, almost choking it to death in his effort to make it follow him.

"If I catch you treating my kitty in this way again, I'll tell your mother, sir," said Mary, severely, as she rescued the kitten from John Henry's Vandal clutches.

"I don't care," said John Henry. "Ma won't do nothing to me."

There it was in a nut-shell. The children knew that they could do what they pleased, and be safe from punishment.

I followed Lucy into the parlour.

"It doesn't seem to me that your parlour is arranged very tastefully," said Lucy. "You've got everything put up so high that it doesn't look well."

I laughed in my sleeve, but soon had cause for becoming serious. Georgy conceived the brilliant idea of making a train of carriages out of the whatnot, and insisted on having it put to that purpose. He got hold of it, and had begun to tip it over when I discovered his purpose.

"You mustn't do that," I said. "Don't you see you're tipping all the things off?"

I pushed the whatnot back into its place, and the little chair flew at me, kicking and scratching.

"How such a spirited child," said Lucy, admiringly. "We can't do anything with him."

After quite a tussle I came off conqueror. Just as I was going to sit down we heard on a wild wall from the sitting-room, followed by a series of shrieks.

"What can be the matter with John Henry?" exclaimed Lucy.

We ran into the sitting-room to find out. John Henry was standing at the sewing-machine, making terrible demonstrations of pain.

I actually felt pleased when I saw what the matter was. He had taken off the cover from the machine, and then essayed to sew. In doing this he had put his finger under the needle. The consequence was that when he started the machine down came the needle through his finger, holding him fast.

"Oh, the poor darling!" said Lucy, in great compassion. "Did the naughty old 'chine hurt me John Henry? It ought to be whipped, didn't it?"

Which punishment John Henry proceeded to inflict on the "naughty old 'chine," as soon as he got over crying. I felt like returning a vote of thanks to the machine for doing its duty.

Dear me! Such a time of it as we had that afternoon! Those horrid children kept Mary or myself on a jump all the time. They pulled up the plants in the garden, dug canals and wells in the middle of my flower-beds, and kept up a perfect Bedlam.

In the evening we gathered in the parlour.

We hadn't been there half an hour before I heard the sound of tearing leaves. I shivered, for I knew what to expect.

"Oh, just see Georgy!" cried Mary's little girl, who had kept herself busy from the time she came home from school in trying to keep Georgy and John Henry out of mischief. "He's got your book!"

I sprang up. Yes, Georgy had captured another book, and was tearing out page after page of pictures!

"He's a rapid reader," laughed his proud parent. "He's got almost through the book."

I didn't say a word. I was too angry to trust myself to speak. I took away the book, and put it up; and at that moment I would have given every book I owned if I could have had the satisfaction of soundly whipping him.

Fifteen minutes of comparative quiet passed. Then John Henry and Georgy got to scuffling about on the carpet, kicking their shoes against the wall-paper and making great dirty marks there. Mary asked them to get up, and I lifted John Henry to a sitting posture, but to no avail. At last, seeing that frowns and entreaties were of no use, I gave it up.

"Oh, ma!" exclaimed John Henry, "we've got a drum! Just listen."

We listened, while John Henry beat his drum in the farthest corner of the parlour, screened from our observation by the centre-table.

"Ain't it nice, ma?" cried John Henry. "Hear it! Whackity, whackity, whack!" with tremendous emphasis.

A terrible conviction of the truth assailed me. A day or two before I had bought a new engraving, to hang upon the wall. Not having a convenient nail, I had set it in a corner temporarily, thinking it would be safe there.

It was as I had expected. His "drum" was my engraving, which, stretched tightly on its wooden frame, gave out a sound having some resemblance to the sound of a drum. John Henry was lying flat on the floor, with his feet flying back and forth for drum-sticks.

"Don't you know better than to kick a picture in that way?" I cried, unfastening it further out of danger.

On inspection it was found to be half-spoiled. The nail in his shoe had穿通 through the surface in several places.

"You'll make quite a drummer, won't you, John Henry?" said his father, as exasperated as if my new engraving had had no more value than a newspaper.

"I don't think I shall pay a sovereign for engravings for them to make drums of," said I, thoroughly provoked.

"I hope you isn't going to get cross with a little boy like John Henry," said his father, resenting the remark. "Of course he didn't know any better. He's only a child."

"He's eight years old," retorted I. "If a boy at that age isn't old enough to know better, the chances are that he'll never know a great deal."

"People haven't any business to put their pictures on the floor," said John Henry's pa, testily.

"I have a right to put my pictures where I please," said I, trying hard to keep cool. "If people come here with children it is their business to keep their children out of mischief."

"I think we'd better have some music," said Mary, who saw a storm brewing and sought to avert it.

"I'll open the thing," yelled John Henry, and made a rush for the organ.

"I'll open it myself, if you please," said I, firmly pushing him away from the instrument.

But the little fellow unlimbered upon the stool and insisted on lifting the cover, which he threw back with a great bang, jarring a bracket which hung over the organ from the nail. My Clytie stood on this bracket, and before I could catch it it was dashed against the organ and broken.

I picked up the pieces with an assumed calmness and took them into an adjoining room. I was getting worked up to the pitch of desperation.

"Oh, mousie, mousie!" I heard Georgy scream, and got back into the room just in time to see John Henry working the pedals as well as he could, while Georgy was clawing the keys at a fearful rate.

It was with the utmost difficulty that I succeeded in getting them away, so that I could play. I didn't feel in the mood for Beethoven or Mendelssohn, I assure you.

"Where does the mousie come from?" said Georgy, unable longer to restrain himself; and before I could stop him he made a grab at the key-board and lifted two keys so high that it wrenched them part way out of their places.

"Go right away this minute!" I exclaimed, seizing him by the arm with such a grip that it frightened him.

He slunk off to one side, and I thought I had awed him into fear of me at last. Vain hope!

Suddenly he made a dive for my knee.

"What's this?" he cried, clutching at the swell. I pushed him away, but he made another grab, and crack, crack! The swell was broken!

I sprang up and, regardless of the presence of his parents, shook him vindictively.

"What are you doing?" cried Lucy, rushing to the child's side.

"I'm teaching him to mind his business," said I, recklessly at last. "Ever since you have been here you have let your children do whatever they pleased. You haven't tried to keep them out of mischief. Since you will not make them behave themselves I will. I have borne all I can."

Lucy began to cry, and John Henry and Georgy joined in chorus. Mr. Mason was horribly angry, but I didn't care.

I said a good deal after that, because I was provoked to it, for he declared I was cross and particular and childish. I told him that I liked visitors as well as anybody else, but I did not care to have people visit me with unruly children. I would prefer to have such people stay at home.

The upshot of the affair was that next morning John Henry took his pa and me, and dear little Georgy and John Henry took their departure, and they haven't visited us since—and I haven't cried about it.

E. H. R.



[STUDYING THE EFFECT.]

SOMETHING OF A FLIRT.

"Now, George, do go and dress. You know how long it takes you. Mr. Millfield will be here before you are ready."

"Time enough, Aunt Jane," replied the wilful young beauty. "Harry and I haven't had our romp out yet—have we, Harry?"

As she spoke she turned her head roguishly and looked over her left shoulder, where Master Harry, her baby brother, a little four-year-old, with chubby face and curling hair, the very image of a young Cupid, was perched triumphantly.

It was a pretty picture! The large cavalier hat which Georgie wore gave a sort of a Vandyke-like air to her face, making it look lovelier than ever; while the arch air of the child, peeping over her shoulder, added something of mischievousness to the whole. In spite of the sweet smile, of the large, loving eyes, and of the tender, mobile mouth, you saw that Miss Georgie Winterglade could be, on occasion, something of a flirt.

"There!" she said, at last, putting the child down, "we have had enough for to-day, Harry. Now I must rush upstairs and dress. Aunt Jane has gone off in a regular huff."

It did not usually take long for Georgie to finish her toilet, but on this occasion her hair would not come right, and she was, consequently, behind time. At last she was ready, and, taking her fan and gloves, she prepared to go downstairs to the drawing-room, where her escort awaited her—the said escort being a handsome young gentleman, well bred, and born in an excellent position in society, Mr. Frederick Augustus Millfield, to whom she was said to be engaged. But before leaving the upper floor she passed into the next chamber, where the very queen of old ladies sat, in a large crimson chair, before a comfortable fire.

"Now, grandma," she said, with a look of mischief and conscious loveliness, "how do I look?"

Mrs. Winterglade was pronounced "charming" by old and young; and was quite as great a belle, in her way, as her more flighty grandchild. The girl was not unlike her, and the starry lustre of those sixty-year-old eyes was reflected, more brightly, in the eyes of twenty. Her widow's dress had not been changed for thirty years; it was nearly covered with crepe, so thick that it had the softness of velvet; while the plain white cap was of snowy freshness. Beautiful hands, that had been painted, and modelled, and kissed, and quarrelled over, lay in her lap; and the still handsome face wore an affectionate smile, that had yet something of sadness in it, as her eyes rested on the figure that courtesied and pirouetted before her.

"Your mirror has already told you all that I think," said Mrs. Winterglade, fondly; "but I am afraid, dear child, that you have quite forgotten Mr. Millfield, who must really feel hurt by this time."

"She generally does forget Millfield," remarked Aunt Jane, who sat on the other side of the fire; "and if I were Frederick Augustus—"

"What would you do now, Aunt Jane, provided you were twenty years younger, and had a legal right to call yourself a man?"

"I would transfer my affections to a girl who had some heart," was the reply, in an irritated tone, for Aunt Jane was not at all pleased with the allusion to her age.

The transparent skin that seemed almost drawn over the lady's thin face was deeply flushed as Miss Georgie threw back her head and laughed as though she could not possibly help it.

"First catch your fish," said she, saucily enough, "for, impossible as it may seem to you, auntie, I am really about as good as other girls—better than some of them. I do think I am rather nice looking, and if I love to flirt a little—"

"A little!" was echoed from the corner.

"Go down, Georgie," said her grandmother, mildly, but in a tone that forbade trifling. "No guest in my house must be treated rudely."

"Yes, grandma," said Georgie, with a kiss that was enough to disarm any amount of anger, "you are the only one who can make me behave myself."

Aunt Jane flushed again, and her head went up a few inches.

"Do you know, though," she continued, "I am quite jealous of Frederick Augustus? I believe you think almost as much of him as you do of me."

Mrs. Winterglade rose deliberately, and, taking the young lady's arm, walked her down to the parlour.

The brow of the young man, which had begun to look gloomy, cleared as he beheld the glowing apartment, and he thought in his heart,

"If to her share some trifling errors fall, Look in her face, and you'll forget them all."

"Have I been long?" asked Miss Georgie, very sweetly, when the gentleman had paid his respects to her grandmother.

This was fairly adding insult to injury; but he answered very creditably that the time always seemed long when he was waiting for her.

He might have said with truth that it not only "seemed," but was long. Miss Georgie, however, smiled benevolently, and vouchsafed no sort of apology for her tardiness.

But Mrs. Winterglade said, very sweetly, that her grand-daughter must be excused this time, as her dressing-maid had been quite unsuccessful with her hair, and it had to be done over at the last moment. Mr. Millfield brightened perceptibly under her genial influence; and it added considerably to Miss Georgie's attractions that she would put him in possession of such a charming grandmother.

"Mother," said Aunt Jane, when Mrs. Winterglade returned upstairs, after the young couple had gone, "you really spoil that girl."

"Let us spoil her, Jane, in a measure," replied the old lady, with her hand on her daughter's, "my only son's and your only brother's only daughter. Nobody but her, and poor little Harry left. These bright, young days come but once in a lifetime; we will strew her path with roses while we can."

But Aunt Jane, or as she should more correctly be called, Mrs. Emmerton, did not approve the rose theory. Georgie, probably, supplied her path with too many thorns.

Meantime let us follow our heroine to the ballroom. Whenever Georgie entered a room there was a perceptible hush in the assembly. Malicious people had even been known to say that anxious dowagers figuratively gathered their sons under their wings, as though she were an improved edition of the wicked giant in fairy tales. But be this as it might, she certainly made a sensation; and the gentleman in attendance always felt himself to be of less consequence even, if possible, than Mr. Toots.

Frederick Augustus realized this rather keenly, as several eager admirers rushed forward on the evening in question the moment Georgie entered; for Miss Winterglade's engagements were never looked upon in the light of other people's engagements—time alone would prove whether she was really to be regarded as private property.

There are some fortunate people who can do and say with impunity things that would not be tolerated for a moment in any one else, and Georgie Winterglade was one of these fortunate individuals. People talked, of course, and blamed her, but, nevertheless, these very people showered smiles upon her and would stand on their heads, as the saying is, for the slightest mark of her favour.

Later in the evening, when Mr. Millfield, in obedience to orders, was endeavouring to make himself agreeable to another young lady—with at least one ear and eye on Georgie's words and movements—a very distinguished-looking man, in military dress, appeared in the doorway, leaning carelessly against the arch, as though he were undecided whether to enter or not.

Georgie's quick eye spied him, and made the rapid discovery that he was quite handsome, with a very heavy moustache and beard, and rather a fiery expression; that he was about forty, and evidently a stranger. She hoped he would come in, he was certainly very interesting. He did not move, however, for some time; and the young lady became quite restless, and changed her seat.

"Come, Hadleigh," said a gentleman to the newcomer, "don't stand there like an ornamental pillar but get fairly into the room, and I'll introduce you to Miss Winterglade, the belle of this bright parterre."

"No, thank you," was the reply; "none of your

Miss Winterglades for me—I have heard of the young lady, and intend to keep clear of her. I have been admiring a very lovely girl—the one yonder, with those great, luminous eyes. Introduce me to her, and your belle may continue to enchant the crowd at the piano, as I think she is doing at this very moment."

The gentleman smiled, but made no answer; and very soon after Charles Hadleigh was presented to the object of his admiration, who turned out, to his astonishment, to be the dangerous Miss Winterglade herself. Moreover, she had heard every word he said, and scarcely knew whether to be pleased or indignant.

As he was a man, however, she reasoned that it would do him no harm to be punished a little. He looked crestfallen, she said to herself, though acknowledging that he had sufficient grounds for this.

Falling quite naturally into the rôle of a very frank and artless girl, with the dimmest possible perception of her own charms, and a happy gift at turning flattering remarks into ridicule, Miss Georgie soon cast a subtle spell over him, who had never met any one quite like her; while poor Frederick glowered at them from a distance.

"I declare," remarked a very plain young lady to her sister, "how shamefully that Georgie Winterglade does behave! And the worse girls act the more men seem to admire them. Just look at poor Mr. Millfield, fairly turned off, while she flirts with that conceited-looking fop! I'll call the poor man over here—he seems so lonely."

Frederick obeyed the beckoning finger, as in duty bound, but did not seem to appreciate the interest he had excited. He answered so absently that Miss Daffie tis her lip with vexation, and finally allowed him to glide away without making any further effort for his detention.

Miss Georgie was exasperating in the extreme, smiling up into Mr. Hadleigh's face, and listening as flatteringly to his words as though he had inherited the wisdom of all the sages; while she quite forgot the waltz she had promised to Frederick, and treated him, when he crossed her path, as though she had been his elder sister.

"Georgina," said Mr. Millfield, quite sternly, when they were driving home, "how is this to end?"

"In other words," she replied, very tantalizingly, "you wish to know what my intentions are? I can only say, at present, that they will be developed by circumstances. Just now I think seriously of going to sleep as soon as my head touches the pillow. Do you know, Aunt Jane considers that she has had a very bad night unless she falls asleep while she is preparing to retire?"

Something like "cruel, heartless flit!" issued from Frederick Augustus's lips.

"Don't call names," said Miss Winterglade, amiably, "for I shall not call you anything."

Mr. Millfield was past speech, and could scarcely refrain from shaking his lady-love as he lifted her out at the grandmother's door.

"Pleasant dreams, and a better frame of mind," was her parting salutation.

His dreams were delightful. Mr. Hadleigh (who appeared to him a very ugly, coarse-looking man) used him as a target for a murderous revolver; while Georgie looked on smiling, and seemed to derive great satisfaction from the performance.

When Mr. Millfield's card was brought in next morning, Miss Winterglade was not equal to the effort of seeing him.

"Now, Georgie," said her grandmother, quite sternly for her, "what does this mean?"

"It means, ma'am," replied the young lady, very meekly, "that Mr. Millfield, last evening, developed some traits of character that I do not admire; and an interview with him this morning would not be satisfactory to either of us."

"How about your traits?" asked Aunt Jane, with a rather vicious twit at her crochet-work.

"They are very well, thank you, ma'am."

Mrs. Winterglade glanced reprovingly at the naughty girl; Mrs. Emmerton made a fresh attack.

"Did you meet any stranger last evening?"

"Yes'm; I was introduced to a very handsome man, a Mr. Hadleigh. He asked permission to call."

Mrs. Emmerton threw a significant look at her mother and suddenly left the room; when Georgie, with a sigh of relief, dropped down on a cushion close to her grandmother, and gazed dreamily into the fire as she remarked:

"I can't realize that Aunt Jane has really been married—she seems just like an old maid."

"I do not approve of your conduct, Georgie," said Mrs. Winterglade, gravely; "you are disrespectful to your aunt and frivolous to your admirers. I tremble for your happiness ten years hence, if you are spared to see that time."

"Ten years is a long time, dear grandmother," said the girl, laughingly, as she caressed one of the beautiful hands; "besides, I intend to reform long before that. I do not mean to be naughty, but Aunt Jane has a gift of drawing out all the bad in my nature. I think she is a good woman, too, and means well by me."

The soberly reflective way in which this was uttered caused Mrs. Winterglade to smile in spite of herself; but she discreetly turned away her head to hide it from Georgie.

"Your Aunt Jane," said she, "was very attractive as a girl, with a delicate, peach-blossom kind of beauty that is seldom seen. You know the romantic story of her first meeting with her husband?"

"Yes," replied Georgie, as though repeating a lesson long since learned by heart, "I remember. She was crowned with lilies, and barefooted, and left, like somebody or other in the mythology, on a rock in the water, by some mischievous girls, who promised to row back for her immediately, but, instead of that, they rowed to land to give her a good fright; and a very handsome young gentleman finally came to her rescue, and took her in his boat; and this was Uncle Emmerton, whom I never saw. I have always envied Aunt Jane that episode. Why don't something romantic happen to me, I wonder? I'm all ready to be fallen in love with in some uncommon way, by some uncommon man; but I'm very tired of ordinary mortals."

"Rather extraordinary sentiments for a young lady who is engaged," said Mrs. Winterglade, disapprovingly. "What would Mr. Millfield say to all this?"

"But, grandmamma dear, I am not really engaged," interposed Georgie; "there is only a sort of understanding between us."

"An understanding for what, may I ask?"

"Why," with a little hesitation, "if we are satisfied with each other we shall be engaged. But I do not think I am satisfied. I didn't like Mr. Millfield's conduct last night. He really seemed jealous and derrable; and I wish him to understand that I have not promised yet to forsake all others, and cleave only unto him."

The reader will probably think that Miss Georgie received only her just deserts in getting an unusually grave lecture from her indulgent grandmother; at least, Aunt Jane did, who was about entering the room while it was in progress, but turned back, in a very comfortable frame of mind, to her own apartment.

Georgie cried and promised amendment, and the dear old lady began to think that "really she had been very severe to the poor child," and bestowed an extra petting on her when the lecture was over.

There were traces of tears in her voice and a pensive expression in the "great, luminous eyes," that were Charles Hadleigh's especial admiration, when Georgie went down to receive that gentleness, and her conquest of the evening before was still more firmly riveted.

Miss Winterglade, after that morning, began to discourse in a new strain. She talked of having "some one to look up to," of "reverencing one's lover and husband," and expressed great disgust for "boys."

Aunt Jane "saw what it was coming to," as she said a number of times, and so did Frederick Augustus, who gnashed his teeth and retired at an early stage of the proceedings, while Mrs. Winterglade mourned over this strange fancy of the spoiled child, and tried her best to discourage her.

"Think, Georgie," she would say, "of those four children!"

"I do think of them, grandmamma," would Georgie reply, "dear little things! I mean to teach them all myself. Don't I teach Harry?"

Aunt Jane said but little. Yet she managed to get Georgie into a towering passion with her one day, when a letter from Charles Hadleigh gave an account of the serious illness of one of the infants, by remarking that it would be a blessed thing for the child and for Georgie if it should be translated to Heaven.

The stepmother elect declared that she would not part with one of them—there were not any too many—and such remarks were utterly savage and unfeeling. Aunt Jane was quite annihilated, and figuratively washed her hands of Georgie's affairs for the future.

People generally thought it a very presuming thing in Mr. Hadleigh, a widower of forty, with four children, to appropriate pretty Georgie Winterglade. They could not imagine what spell he had cast over her. Others looked rather incredulous, and wondered how long it would last. Mr. Hadleigh was supremely happy; for not only the young lady herself, but all her surroundings were perfectly unexceptionable. Mrs. Winterglade was a connexion to be proud of; and her establishment had an air of

wealth and refinement that had come down through several generations.

Colonel Hadleigh was a very proud man, rejoicing in a family that he said could be traced back to the Norman Conquest; and one of the highest praises he had to bestow on Georgie was that "she would grace a coronet." He hinted that there was a stray one floating about in his family, and some day it might actually rest on those beautiful locks.

The four children had all been to spend the day at Mrs. Winterglade's, and nearly deafened her with their noise, sticking up her best chairs with candy, and roaring at the top of their lungs whenever their innocent recreations were interfered with. Aunt Jane said, very dryly, that those who loved them could enjoy the comforting conviction that they were not destined to early deaths.

One day, however, Miss Georgie tried her power with Mr. Hadleigh and went too far. It was something like that story of the chivalrous period where a lady tested her lover's bravery by dropping her glove into an enclosure containing some savage animals and dared the gentleman to rescue it. She recovered her glove, but lost her lover; and so it was with Georgie. Her unreasonable demand was politely complied with, and she was as politely "released," as Mr. Hadleigh expressed it, in an unexceptionable note, that she tore to pieces and danced on; and then she rushed to her grandmother with such white cheeks and flaming eyes that Mrs. Winterglade was fairly frightened.

"Georgie," said the old lady, mournfully, when the full extent of this humiliation was made known to her, "you are very much to blame."

"Oh!" cried Georgie, in mingled anger and distress, "do send me away somewhere, grandmamma—I can never meet that hateful man again!"

And she comforted herself by throwing into the fire quite an elaborate doll that she had been preparing for the eldest hope of the Hadleighs.

"I wish I could go into a convent," added the young lady, as she reflected upon her very unpleasant position.

"You would be flirting with the priests before you had been there a week," remarked Aunt Jane.

Georgie took this quite meekly, and even wondered whether a regular course of Aunt Jane might not be a beneficial though bitter tonic. She cried, and her eyes were swollen and her cheeks pale, and as it was impossible to scold her in this condition, her grandmother said, kindly:

"Go to bed, my child, and in the morning we will talk this matter over."

Georgie went, and sobbed herself to sleep, more, it is to be feared, because Mr. Hadleigh had sent in his resignation, instead of being dismissed, than from any feeling of disappointed love. Frederick Augustus and the other unfortunates seemed likely to be re-vented.

Mrs. Winterglade passed a wakeful night, blaming herself severely for Georgie's misdemeanours, and wondering what disposal she had better make of her troublesome charge. As Georgie said, she could not meet Mr. Hadleigh again, which she was likely to do if she remained in town; and, as it was June, a quiet country retreat seemed the best thing that offered. People like Mrs. Winterglade usually have such conveniences, and all others, at their command. A very obliging farmer cousin would, she knew, feel highly honoured by a visit from the young lady; and, as the place in question was as different as possible from Brighton, a month's retirement in that quiet region would, probably, have a most beneficial effect.

Georgie made a wry face when Cousin Golder's was first proposed to her; but in the end she acquiesced with a very good grace. She was glad to go somewhere, and it was not the season yet for anything exciting; besides, she had a dim, undefined sort of feeling that, in some way, she was going to meet her fate, and that it was coming to her in a very pleasant shape. How could she tell but that it might be a second and improved edition of Aunt Jane's adventure, with lilies and bare feet, on a rock in the water? It was not the season for lilies, but Georgie did not stop at this.

Aunt Jane packed Georgie's trunk with a sort of cheerful malice that was rather hard to bear, and even proposed accompanying the exile to her Siberia; but Georgie felt that this was making her punishment disproportioned to the offence, and resolutely declined.

Grandmamma was quite solemn at parting from her pet, and gazed after her wistfully, from the platform, until the train was in motion, but Georgie appeared to be in high spirits, and assured the old lady that in two hours' time she would be in the bosom of Cousin Golder's family, and, perhaps, helping with the week's churning or baking.

She never got there at all.

She had disposed of her travelling-bag, and opened her novel, discovered that the inevitable wo-

man and baby were on the right, the stout gentleman just behind, and the young man who stared and was disposed to be officious, in front of her, but, becoming quite oblivious of all these surroundings, she was tracing her heroine through a most delightfully dramatic dilemma, to the total absorption of all things real.

Suddenly there was a lurch in the train—a crash another crash—another lurch, and Georgie was thrown from her seat. Darkness and confusion! A hand grasped her, she was raised in somebody's arms and dragged through a window, but, quite unheroic-like, she did not faint, and was fully conscious that she had received several bruises.

She was stunned, at first, by the suddenness of this unlooked-for episode, but remembering that some one had rescued her, she turned to look upon her preserver, and then she screamed for the first time, and hid her face in her hands.

It was Frederick Augustus.

Never had he acquitted himself so well, both in act and speech, and he looked really noble as he said:

"I could no help it, Georgie. Do not think me guilty of the meanness of following you. I took the train solely on business, with no knowledge whatever of your movements, and my surprise at seeing you here was quite as great as yours now is at seeing me. Will you let me do what I can for you?"

The coals of fire were falling fast and furious, and Miss Georgie instinctively put her hands to her head.

"You have saved my life," she murmured. "and I so little deserve it!"

"Georgie," whispered her deliverer, "may I dare—"

"Only run into another train," said a gentleman, as he passed them; "grand smash up, and several, I believe. All who have whole bones should be thankful."

Georgie shuddered, and drew closer to her protector. No need to go to the middle ages for chivalry, nor to swords and epaulettes for bravery; this was more than being rescued from a rock in the water, and Aunt Jane's little episode sank into nothingness beside it.

Mrs. Winterglade could scarcely believe her eyes, later in the day, when a carriage drove up, and the granddaughter whom she had supposed safely domiciled by this time at Cousin Gilders' alighted, with the most tender assistance from Mr. Millfield.

She was thankful, after the first shock, that it was not a new admirer.

"Georgie," said the old lady, when they were somewhat quieted, "and he had taken his leave, "is there a fresh understanding between you and Mr. Millfield? It seems to me that things look like it."

The crimson cheeks and fast-filling eyes were quite eloquent as Georgie nestled up to her grandmother.

"No, dear grandmamma, but, with your approbation, there is now a firm engagement, as secretly binding to me as the marriage vow itself. You approve, do you?"

"With all my heart, my dear child. In spite of his quiet exterior I always felt that there was a great deal in Frederick Millfield. But he must not take you away from me too soon."

"He is certainly very forgiving," remarked Aunt Jane, who could not help saying it for the life of her.

Georgie left her nestling-place and walked directly up to her aunt. Before the astonished lady could realize it a kiss had been pressed on her lips, and a gentle voice whispered:

"He is forgiving, Aunt Jane—will you be so too?" E. R.

BE CHEERFUL.

WHAT a thing it is to be cheerful, and to have cheerful people about one. Life, except during the pressure of its most terrible calamities, always has a bright side, and those who look at that side are far the wisest. Yet there are excellent people who go about bowed down under a weight of forebodings, who feel sure the worst thing possible will happen, who, indeed, make it manifest that, in their opinion, it has happened already. A funeral is not more sad in their eyes than a wedding or a christening. To be sure, they do not wear the "costmary suit of solemn black" at these latter, but, in their light silks and white gloves, they groan, and they water the orange flowers and white rosebuds with tears as thoroughly as they do the cypress.

"Poor, dear Maria Jane," they say, "may she be happy—but it's not likely when one knows what men are, or, if she is—if he is all that can be desired, of course she'll be left a widow, and then what will she do? for he's too improvident to leave anything.

And baby! ah, yes, best to have it christened soon. So many babies die! May go off in the night with croup, and if it lives, why, you can't tell, at its age but that it may be deaf and dumb, or have curvature of the spine, or be an idiot, or grow up to be something dreadful and break its mother's heart. Christen it, of course, poor dear, that's a duty, but don't be cheerful over it."

To Mr. and Mrs. Doleful Dumps the sky always threatens rain. Waterproof and umbrellas, and your worst dress, is the costume they always advocate. Five minutes' delay on a journey is untold misery to them. The air is always close, or there is a draught. It is "perfectly frightful" out of doors, either because of sun or rain. Any social occasion is always remembered by the toil and labour of getting ready for it, and the faults of a friend are enumerated when he is spoken of, not his excellencies. No seat is comfortable, no condition agreeable. One is tempted to wonder whether the Dumps family will not actually be happier in their graves than anywhere else.

In contrast to this, how delightful is a breezy, merry creature who enjoys life; who loves the "fun" of getting ready for anything; who doesn't mind an hour's delay, and rather likes rain, though sunshine does make him or her "so jolly"; who had just as soon have the chair that is too high or too low, and rather prefers the piano-stool that doesn't work well; who has inevitably "had such a splendid time!" and shrieks with laughter over accidents that are almost the cause of suicide to the Doleful Dumps set. Such a cheerful creature is more precious than gold or diamonds, and though the Doleful Dumps may groan, blots them out as sunshine does the darkness when one throws wide the door.

M. K. D.

THE LITTLE BLACK DOG.

"I HAVE been followed home by the oddest little black dog." I said to my friend, Miss Douglass, as I returned one day from a walk over the hills—the Scottish hills of which I had within a week or two taken my first glimpse, after dreaming of them all my life. "The prettiest little creature too. I thought he had taken a fancy to me, but when I tried to pat him he bit my finger and ran away."

"Thank Heaven for all its mercies!" said Miss Douglass.

She said it so fervently that I was astonished. Was she so thankful that I had not been worse bitten, or that I had been so ill used? She had worn a very long face until I had mentioned the fact, and then she had smiled and cried out, joyously:

"You're surprised, I see, my dear," she said, answering my look. "But I'll explain. I'm just thankful you were followed home by a dog that could bite—that it was no our dog—our wee black dog. I've a salse for the bite you've got, but T've nothing to help one that's followed by our wee doggie."

"Have you really so bad a dog as that?" I asked; "or is it some joke that I do not understand?"

"No joke at all, my dear," said Miss Douglass.

"The wee black doggie we call ours is not a living dog at all. It's just a phantom doggie; and when it is seen tracking a stranger to our house that stranger comes to give or take harm. It's a story we get from those who lived here before us, and I used to laugh at it myself. Whenever I saw a small dog I'd cry:

"'Grannie if it's na the Douglass wee doggie,' and Grannie'd shake her head. 'Don't scoff at what you don't understand,' she'd say, and I came to know she was right.

"Ah, well, grannie was dead and gone before I did though. I was looking out of the window one day, and my sister Effie sat beside me. We were making patch-work for a silk quilt—the bonniest pattern. And I'd just said to her 'Effie, lass, which of us is married first shall have the quilt,' when, looking up, both of us saw coming up the path a young man, with a handsome face and a light step, and at his heels a wee doggie, as black as any ink."

"It's the Douglass doggie," says I, laughing.

"Well, is he coming to bring ill or to take it?" asked Effie, and then she shuddered all over. "Ah, Janie, if it should be true!" said she.

"An auld wife's story like that," said I. "But what has he had come for?"

"That neither of us knew until we were called to supper, then there he was with grandfather. He had come from Edinburgh on business, and was to bide with us awhile. He was a rich lawyer's son, and a lawyer himself, and he had a silver tongue, my dear, and could say what he chose to say, and

as he chose to say it. I mind the first night he talked the most to me and looked the most at Effie. I'm not a handsome woman now, and I was as far from being one then; but every one knew I was to have grandfather's money, and I had no lack of suitors. Effie was beautiful, like a picture. You scarcely ever see so pretty a face. Such colour, such hair, and that night she kept her eyes fixed upon his face, and listened to every word he said, though she did not say much herself. Amongst other things I know he told us—and it was when grandfather was out of the room, I mind well—of a black dog that had followed him for some distance; 'the shyest, oddest creature,' said he—and as small. Do you know it? Is it yours?" "Perhaps it is," said I, laughing. "It's the Douglass' wee doggie, no doubt."

"And we teased him a long time ere we told him the story. That was a merry night. We had never met a lad we liked so well, Effie and I.

"Well, there was a lad, and there were two lasses. You guess what comes next. Before long he had begun to make love to one of us, of course, and though I told you I was the ugly one it was to me. He was shy about it, and said his sweet things to me when we were alone, and got me to meet him in quiet spots away from all eyes. And I was not one to tell such things, and no one ever knew. Only as the silk quilt grew I used to say to Effie 'Maybe I'll have the right to this, Effie,' and she answered 'Maybe twill be I.'

"And it was such a sweet secret to keep, my dear. It was like hiding away a posy in your bosom, and getting the smell of it all the while. It made me blithe as a child.

"What's come to the lass?" grandfather would say. "She used to be the steady one."

"And Rab had said to me—yes, all the name I'll tell ye of him is Rab—Rab had said 'Let's keep quiet about this yet, my dear, and when the spring comes you and I will be wed. We'll tell them all in time for the wedding, but not a word yet!'

"Not ever to Effie?" said I.

"And he said 'Not ever to Effie,' and his word had grown to be law to me, and I hid the engagement ring in my bosom, and did not wear it on my finger; but I blamed myself for keeping such a secret from my sister.

"I mind well that winter had almost gone when one day I stood at the door, smelling the sweet fresh air, and thinking what spring would give me, and of what grandfather and Effie would say, when, all of a sudden, I saw, right at the door-stone, the little dog that had come to it with Rab, and that I had not seen since.

"The pretty creature," I said, and stooped to pat it on the back, but it slipped away.

"Come here, doggie," said I, but it turned and ran away down the path, and I followed. It had a queer look to me then—as if it were the wraith of a dog—and I mind I felt a fright steal over me.

"I'll catch it and hold it," said I, casting the thought of the Douglass doggie away from me.

"It made no noise with its feet, and, lassie, it threw no shadow, and suddenly it slipped about the turning of a hedge, and my hand was on it and touched nothing, and there I stood face to face with Rab and Sister Effie, and there was no doggie to be seen. But she was sitting on his knee, with her hand lying in the one that was not about her waist. They sat as lovers do—none else. Oh, the wrath I felt! I stood looking at them both fiercely as they started up—she red, he pale.

"Sister," said she, "don't be angry with me. I'd a mind to tell you long ago, but Rab said no. And I saw that she was innocent, and had never guessed what he was to me, and I knew that I had followed the black dog of the Douglass on the track of a traitor.

"I will not speak to you, sir," I said, "until I have spoken to my sister." And I took her lily-white hand and led her home.

"Then we talked as we should have talked before—and when our talk was done we knew him. He loved her for her pretty face, and he would have married me for my money, knowing he had her heart.

"Marry him if you will, Effie," said I.

"But I was sorry I had said it. We knew each other too well—one could not love a man who had been traitor to the other.

"At the close of the day we stood at our window and watched him go. He passed down the road with his head bent on his breast. The sun was sinking—his shadow lay long behind him—after it a small, dark object glided. We both saw it, Effie and I.

"'Tis the Douglass wee doggie following him away," I said; "he has taken harm as well as brought it."

"And, my dear, I think the shame he felt was great harm to so vain a man; and besides, he loved Effie.

"The poor lassie did not live long. She could not bear what I could, and I've been alone for many a year; but I know now that grannie was right when she bade me never scoff at the Douglass' wee doggie." M. K. D.

FACETIAL.

JOTTINGS FROM "JUDY."

Cooks generally serve up Australian mutton cold, because they say they don't know how to 'eat it.'

If it were not for the Livery, many an alderman would be taken for his own servant.

"Patience on a monument."—The statue on Temple Bar.

A fishy drink.—Anchovy toast and water.

Require no ink.—Sheep-pens.

Valuable, and most popular.—Prints of Wales in India.

One good result of the recent high tides.—The prevention of a run upon the Banks of the Thames.—Judy.

TIDY.—Why is having your optic bandaged like the Thames overflow? Because it's having high tide up.—Fun.

IS-BALKING.—If a Hebrew utters a witticism, may it be properly called a "jeu de Mo?" N. B. This is Aaronic.

A NEGATIVE COMPLIMENT.—Parell House, Bom-bay (since the Prince of Wales made it his head-quarters) is to be called "Nonpareil House."—Punch.

BAD PROSPECTS.

Look out! for a demon approaches

With artful, insidious stealth—

A demon who ever encroaches

On all the preserves of our health.

Look out for asthmatical "wheezing,"

And colds that are extra-severe;

Prepare to find water-buts freezing—

For winter's unpleasantly near!

Good-bye to the autumn-time joyous,

That charmed with its roseate hue,

Ere long, snow and slush will annoy us,

And noses look frosty and blue.

Soon all will be slipping and sliding,

The poor will be sorry and sad;

The winter-tide forward is striding,

And seals are expensive—and bad.—Fun.

A VOICE FROM THE CLOUDS.

JUPITER PLUVIUS: "Store your floods, and embank your rivers, and this misery would prove a blessing!"—Punch.

TO GIRLS WHO "WALK WITH THE GUN." ETHEL: "Aren't you going to shoot to-day, uncle?"

UNCLE: "Not if you are, my dear. When I was young the men shot the birds, and the women stayed at home to cook them."—Punch.

THE SERVANTS.

COOK: "Then, shall you go as 'ousemald?"

YOUNG PERSON: "No, indeed! If I go at all, I go as lady 'elp'!"—Punch.

ART AND NATURE.

WIFE (looking at husband's photo): "How beautifully your hair comes out, Robert!"

HUSBAND (rapidly bald'ning): "Ye'om, by Jove, in combfuls!"—Fun Almanack, 1876.

GARDENING GOSSIP AND TUPPERIAN TRIVIALITY.

There's not a rose without its thorn, for men who are of women born

(The man who's of another kind you'll have an awful task to find).

The pickled cabbage grows all red—all ready for its meat and bread

(The pickled cabbage might be green; our pickle time has verdant been).

The lily's white, the violet's blue—secret dark for me and hue

(And why they can't be other tints we'll find out for some future hints).

The trees in autumn lose their leaves, but houses always keep their eaves

(An earnest "dropper" told us 'this, but why it's so we dare not wis').

The early-bird picks up the worm, the spring is now a vernal term

(We've heard it called the equine hocks, which puzzled much our knowledge-box).

The corn it grows upon a stalk—we saw it once when on a walk

(Batis the corn a garden fruit?—we carry ours with-in our boot).

And green must grow the rashes, oh, because a writer once said so

(We've often asked the reason why, but never learned—and we, good bye).—Fun Almanack, 1876.

STRANGE BUT TRUE.—Mr. Plim sol has written a long letter to the papers concerning grain cargoes.

Sympathetic as are his remarks with regard to the preservation of life at sea in connection with this subject, they all go against the grain.—Fun.

THAT "EXPLAINS IT."

GREEN: "How is it, Brown, you always have such splendid fruit from your garden? I exhibit and carry off cups and prizes (at least my gardener does, for I only see it in print), but I never have such fruit as this on my table!"

BROWN: "Simplest thing in the world, old fellow. I keep a gardener for my garden; you keep a garden for your gardener!"

"MY—BABY—BUMPIN!"

ACTIVE LADY MEMBER OF SCHOOL BOARD: "And have you and your wife any family?"

ASTUTE BUMPKIN: "Yes, miss, we are two."

LADY: "What, two boys?"

A. B.: "Oh, noa, a boy and girl—and I be the bo—Fun."

NOT TO BE CAUGHT.

ECONOMIC OLD OFFICER (to new footman): "Now then, Patrick, call me a cab."

PAT (who thinks this a dodge to try his sincerity): "Och, no, your honour, it's not myself that'll be calling you names at all at all!"—Fun.

"YOUTH WILL BE SHREWD."

KIND HOSTESS (encouragingly): "Now, Mr. Spoonbill, I'm sure you want a vis-a-vis."

SPONNIBL (oh! so young): "No, thank you, I'd rather not—I've just had a bun."—Fun Almanack, 1876.

ONE WOMAN'S LIFE.

A BEAUTIFUL life—so brave and true,

Like a gently gliding river
That flows and flows, as on it goes,
'Mid shade and shine for ever.

A wife that brought a sunny heart
To light a darksome dwelling,
And scatter, here and there, good cheer,
All angry passions quelling.

That carried, with a steady hand,
Among her sons and daughters,
Through care and toil, the oil of oil,
To soothe life's troubled waters.

A wife that sought her husband's good,
And never failed to measure
Each daily need, each want, indeed,
By his good will and pleasure.

Who, when the storms of life beat hard,
And clouds obscured true duty,
Rose up in might to seek the light,
A tower of strength and beauty.

One woman's life; and yet we know
That there are many others
As good and true, as patient too,
Among the wives and mothers.

Ay! many who seem near divine,
And yet so very human!
A picture rare, and sweet, and fair
A perfect, loving woman!

M. A. K.

GEMS.

THE HUMAN VOICE.—How wonderful is the human voice! It is indeed the organ of the soul. The intellect of man sits enthroned visibly upon his forehead and in his eye, and the heart of man is written upon his countenance; but the soul reveals itself in the voice only. The soul of man is audible, not visible. A sound alone betrays the flowing of the eternal fountain, invisible to man.

Now.—"Now" is the constant syllable ticking from the clock of time, "Now" is the watchword of the wise. "Now" is on the banner of the prudent. Let us keep this little word always in mind, and whenever anything presents itself to us in the shape of work, whether mental, spiritual or physical, we should do it with all our might, remembering that "now" is the only time for us. It is indeed a sorry way to get through the world by putting off till to-morrow, saying, "then" I will do it. No! this will never answer. "Now" is ours; "then" may never be.

THE programme for the great National Welsh Eisteddfod of 1875, at Wrexham, has now been finally arranged, and the adjudicators have been selected. The programme embraces Welsh and English subjects in poetry and prose; translations; Welsh, English, and Latin, music—vocal, instrumental, and composition; art, science, and history.

Nearly 1,000L will be given away in prizes. An art exhibition on a large scale is being arranged to be held in connection with the Eisteddfod.

STATISTICS.

OCCUPIERS OF LAND IN IRELAND.—The agricultural statistics of Ireland recently completed for 1873 show that in that year there were 590,172 separate holdings, being 5,041 less than in the preceding year. The decrease was in the small holdings. The number of holdings not exceeding one acre fell to 51,977, a decrease of 908, and the number above one acre and not exceeding 15 acres, shows a decrease of 3,777. The holdings above one acre can be compared with the numbers in 1841. Since that date the total number has decreased 22 per cent. The number of farms above one and not exceeding five acres has fallen to 72,088 (in 1873), a decrease of 768 per cent.; the number of farms above five and not exceeding 15 acres has diminished to 168,644, a decrease of 835 per cent.; the number above 15 and not exceeding 30 acres has risen to 138,163, an increase of 741 per cent.; and the number above 30 acres has increased to 169,966, an increase of 228 per cent. Of the total number of holdings in 1873 88 per cent. did not exceed one acre; 12.2 per cent. were above one and not exceeding five acres; 28.5 per cent., five to 15 acres; 28.4 per cent., 15 to 30 acres; 12.4 per cent., 30 to 50 acres; 9.4 per cent., 50 to 100 acres; 3.7 per cent., 100 to 200 acres; 1.4 per cent., 200 to 500 acres; 0.2 per cent., above 500 acres. More than 60 acres in every 100 of the land comprising farms above 500 acres are bog or waste. As the farms diminish in size, the proportion under bog and waste decreases until it amounts to only 7.1 per cent. on the smallest holdings. The average extent of the holdings not exceeding one acre is 1 rood and 32 perches, and of farms above 500 acres 1,371 acres and 19 perches.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

DELICATE CAKE.—One cup of white sugar; five teaspoonsfuls of butter; whites of six eggs; one cup of sweet milk; one teaspoonful of soda; two teaspoonsfuls of cream tartar; three cups of flour; lemon extract to flavour.

TOFFEE.—Put one pound of powdered loaf sugar with a teaspoonful of water into a brass pan. When the sugar is dissolved add a quarter of a pound of butter beaten to a cream; keep stirring the mixture over the fire till it sets, when a little is poured on to a buttered dish; just before the toffee is done add six drops of essence of lemon. Batter a dish or tin, pour on it the mixture, and when cool it will easily separate from the dish.

CHURCH MUFFINS.—One quart of rich milk, or, if you can get it, half cream and half milk, a quart of flour, six eggs, one tablespoonful of butter, one of lard, softened together. Beat whites and yolks, separately, very light, then add flour and shortening, and a teaspoonful of salt, and stir in the flour the last thing, lightly as possible, and have the batter free from lumps. Half fill well-buttered muffin rings, and bake immediately in a hot oven, or the muffins will not be good. Send to table the moment they are done.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A CONSIDERABLE number of workmen at Montmartre have forwarded to the Empress Eugénie a splendid bouquet of violets as a token of regret, faith hope, and fidelity.

The Barnes Championship boat-race was rowed on the Thames between Boyd, of Newcastle, and Sadler, of London. The last-named won easily. Time, 29 minutes 2 seconds.

The statue of the first King of the Belgians, which is to be erected at Mons, opposite the railway station, has just been cast in bronze, at Montrouge, near Paris.

The effect of the much-hailed new electoral law in France will diminish very largely the number of deputies. The present assembly consists of 735, but under the new system the number will be only 502.

The long expected balance-sheet of Egypt is announced, and it shows a surplus—very small indeed, only 16,000L on a revenue of nearly eleven millions—but still it is satisfactory, for the balance is the right way, and things are sound in that case.

In the month of November occur the anniversaries of the birth of Donizetti (1797), Bellini (1801), Sponzini (1847), Carafa, (1787), and of the death of Mendelssohn (1847), Rossini (1868), Gluck (1783), and Schubert (1828).

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

JOLIE.—1st. Bay rum will not injure the skin. 2nd. There is no impropriety in visiting your physician during his office hours.

ALICE.—Your lover's absence may be occasioned by illness. We should not recommend you to write to him unless you first receive some word from him.

BELLE.—If the young man has no home to offer you, and thinks that by waiting another year he will be in a position to marry, we think your parents should encourage you in waiting.

STILE.—You can with propriety wear the suit you mention in your letter. A white cravat and vest would improve your appearance and give to your toilet more the full-dress style.

HORN.—The young lady being engaged should be sufficient reason why she should not answer letters addressed to her from any gentleman beside him to whom she is engaged. We think the young lady owes you an apology if the case is as you have stated in your letter.

HOUSEKEEPER.—There are plenty of chemicals used for disinfectants, but we prefer ground coffee as being harmless and pleasant; it is the most powerful deodorizer in common use, and is excellent to place in an open dish in a sick room.

CLARA H.—Of course, every young lady should learn to swim. It is easily learned, and only requires confidence. Women are physically as well qualified for swimming as men; their superior buoyancy makes up for their inferior strength of muscle.

J. R.—As to our being engaged to a young man you will perceive, upon reflection, that it is not a supposable case. But we can advise you, nevertheless, just tell the young man confidentially what your own mother's views are, and see how they strike him.

MATTIE.—Your case confirms our view. We cannot suggest anything but a truthful, straightforward statement of facts, if a statement becomes necessary. All roundabout and scheming devices are seen through, ought to be resented, and are so commonly.

ALFRED.—Talk the matter over with the young ladies in your neighbourhood, to whom you can explain your situation more fully than to us, and ascertain their views on the particular point of inquiry which you make.

TOPIA.—You had better apply without any delay; telegraphy is taught and all the arrangements are suited to such cases as yours. You will be told regarding time, and other points on which you desire information. Do not be discouraged. Ladies can make their way by intelligence, diligence, and ordinary energy.

HOSA H. W.—Cremation is a very ancient idea, and has been practiced in all ages and countries. The Digger Indians of California burn with the body of the deceased, everything belonging to him—bow, arrows, ornaments, cooking utensils, and the like. Their "funerals" are wild carousals after their savage fashion.

EPICURE.—The edible birds' nests are built by swallows peculiar to the East Indian Islands, and are much esteemed by the Chinese. In consistency they are not unlike glass. The birds' nest pudding, so called on our hotel bills of fare, is custard baked with whole apples.

NATTIE.—1st. We agree with you; the gentleman would not visit you as often as he does unless he found your society agreeable. 2nd. We should not endeavour to find out if he visits another lady were we in your position. If he wished you to know he will tell you. Trust him and let him see you have faith in his friendship. We know of no better way of gaining his confidence and love.

Q. U. T.—1. Maple sugar is obtained from the rock or sugar maple. In early spring, often in February, as soon as the sap commences to run up in the trees they are tapped near the ground by boring, a tube inserted in the hole, and a vessel is set or hung to catch the sap as it trickles out. The process of making the sugar consists of merely boiling down the sap in kettles over an open fire. When sufficiently concentrated the syrup is poured into moulds or pans to granulate.

A. C. M.—1st. There can be no set form of conversation when making New Year calls beyond a pleasant greeting and wishes for happiness. Your conversation will be governed by the nature of your friendship for the parties upon whom you are calling. 2. The time that you remain must necessarily depend upon how many calls you have to make and how much time you have to make them in. If calling upon intimate friends you may with propriety remain longer than when calling upon a mere acquaintance.

SICK OF HOME.—Your case appears rather an unenviable one. However, if you had no home you would find

much more cause for complaint. Perhaps your father has annoyances that you know nothing of. We can only recommend that you endeavour to bear patiently his bursts of ill-humour, and by so doing you may in time gain his confidence. If at times you lose your patience and become almost discouraged, remember there are many who have neither homes, nor fathers, nor any one who cares enough for their welfare to think it worth while to interest themselves enough in them to grow out of patient in their doings. Do the best you can; make the most of what you have, and, above all, try and be cheerful and patient.

CAPTAIN WILLIAMS.—1. The Great Eastern was built to run to Australia, but never made a trip to that part of the world. She was constructed to afford accommodations for 800 first-class passengers, 3,000 second, and 1,200 third class. She was launched Jan. 31, 1859, nearly three months having been spent in the effort. The capital of the company having been expended, a new company was formed to fit her for sea. On Sept. 7, 1859, she left her moorings at Deptford for Portland roads, and on the voyage an explosion took place in which seven were killed and others injured. She wintered at Southampton, after an unsuccessful attempt to cross the Atlantic, owing to the breaking of the rudder post. In June, 1860, she sailed for New York, arriving on the 28th. She returned to England in August, when she fell into the hands of the sheriff, but was released and sailed for New York in May, 1861. She made several trips across during the next two years, and in March or April, 1861, was bought by Glase, Elliot, and Co., and was chartered to lay the Atlantic telegraph cable.

OPROSES.

Where'er the sun sheds its molten beams
We talk of frost and snow,
Whene'er the snow and frost assail,
We praise the sun's bright glow,
And thus we gather here and there
Some comfort as we go.

That is, if it is a comfort to
To never rest content,
But fret the precious hours away
At trials Heaven-sent;
Or watch for elemental signs
And errors consequent.

We seldom find a happy man
Contented with his lot,
A real, joyous, sunny heart,
In palace or in cot;
That pines not for some fancied good
That he, as yet, hath not.

The tall man would be five feet two,
The small man longs for size,
The poor for wealth, the sick for health,
The foolish to be wise;
Yet wise and sick and healthy walk
In discontented guise.

The strapping longs to be a man,
The man to be a boy,
The maiden or the childish wife
Deems motherhood a joy,
While weary mothers oft look back
At bliss without alloy.

The sailor looketh toward the land,
The landsman toward the sea,
Thus restless hearts and changeful minds
"Agree to disagree,"
Except in one thing great and grand,
All men love happy!

M. A. K.

J. B.—We can hardly fancy ourselves you; but if we had not spoken for a year we should consult a physician regarding the vocal chords and see what was the matter. Do not presume on the lady's looking at you. If you were within reach we should look at you also, or at every young "reader" so afflicated as not to speak for a year. But that would not prove that we were in love with you. As to trying to forget that lovely young lady, we cannot counsel it for a moment. We say at once take steps to recover your speech and tell her your story.

EDITH.—Do not absolutely throw him off. Do not now renege him in the old place. Put him "on probation," and a pretty long one. He has no right to complain of this; a lady is not to be at any man's bidding. He has acted weakly not wrongly, and you owe it to yourself that you be not trifled with again.

ADA.—1. An engaged young lady ought to wear the engagement ring given her. 2. She ought either by words or very intelligible signs, to show she is devoted to a lover that she is not adamantine. 3. Without hearing her side of the case we could not advise that he be abandoned. She may be afraid of losing what is of so much value—a ring from her betrothed; or she may be afraid of puffing him up with vanity by telling him how much she loves him. 4. On the slight knowledge of the writer which his letter furnishes, we cannot give a distinct answer to the last question, and we are unwilling to raise hopes that might not be realized.

M. S.—We cannot see the evidences of a call to the ministry in your case. That you are complimented as a speaker and have a great love for declaiming is no good sign. Society is sorely afflicted with declaimers. The first requisite of a minister is that he be a good man. Your candid acknowledgment precludes that idea in reference to yourself, and possibly your neighbours—when not under the spell of your declamation—would put it a little more strongly. It would be a good thing if young ministers had to educate themselves as young lawyers and doctors have to do. Of course exceptional circumstances and rare and obvious qualifications justify aid being given; but if you had those qualifications your Methodist brethren—who allow no talent to go to waste—would have found them out.

E. D. S. C., wishes to correspond with a young lady of about sixteen; a brunet preferred.

LUCE.—Accept the attentions of the other gentlemen he has kept away at once and reject his altogether. He is unworthy the true love of a true girl.

FLORA.—We think that after you had once given her the ring it was wrong and ungentlemanly for you to ask her to return it.

TERENCE, twenty, medium height, good tempered, blue eyes, fond of home, wishes to correspond with a respectable young lady about twenty, with a view to matrimony.

MILLA, eighteen, medium height, fair, good looking and of a loving disposition, wishes to correspond with a young gentleman; respondent must be fond of home and music.

ALICE, eighteen, medium height, fresh complexion, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, and in a good position, wishes to correspond with a dark young gentleman with a view to matrimony.

AMEROCY, twenty, medium height, a good housekeeper and fond of home, would like to correspond with a respectable business man with a view to matrimony; a widow preferred.

AGNES and HILDA would like to correspond with two respectable young men. Agnes is twenty-two, medium height, light hair, brown eyes, and of a loving disposition. Hilda is twenty, medium height, brown hair, hazel eyes, and of a loving disposition. Both are considered good looking and thoroughly domesticated; respondents must be fond of home and good tempered.

GEMMA, thirty, a widow, would like to correspond with a loving, thoroughly domesticated person, who would make a comfortable home, with a view to matrimony.

KATE A, twenty, tall, brown hair and eyes, thoroughly domesticated, wishes to correspond with a respectable man; respondent must be tall, dark and good tempered.

W. P., twenty-four, dark complexion, rather tall, in a good position, would like to correspond with an educated young lady, who is fond of home, domesticated, and of a loving disposition.

W. K. and J. A., sisters, wish to correspond with two young lady about nineteen or twenty. W. K. is twenty, dark hair, gray eyes. J. A. is twenty-two, dark hair, dark hair and gray eyes.

BIG OR THE DAD, M. S. S., about twenty-five, dark and curly hair and whiskers, hazel eyes, wishes to correspond with a young lady about nineteen or twenty, of a loving disposition and fond of home.

FOUND AND FOUND, a steward in the Royal Navy, about twenty-one, M. S. S., light brown hair and whiskers, blue eyes, of a light-hearted disposition, would like to correspond with a young lady about seventeen or eighteen; respondent must have a loving disposition, be able to sing and dance, and must be able to make a home happy.

UNCLE SAM'S BOY, a lieutenant in the U. S. army, wishes to correspond with a young lady, who would like to make her abode in the United States and can make a home happy.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED.

MAY is responded to by—James, twenty, dark, medium height.

JENNIE and NELLIE by—Brownlow and Ernest, two brothers. Brownlow is twenty-one, dark, very good looking, and in a good way of business with his brother; would like to hear from Jennie. Ernest is twenty-two, fair, blue eyes, considered very handsome; would prefer Nelly.

MILLY by—J. B., a clerk, eighteen, tall, good prospects and has money left for him when of age.

P. C. F. by—John B. B., rather short, light complexion, brown eyes and hair, good tempered and steady, fond of music.

GEMMA by—Domestic, thirty-two, medium height, fair and very good tempered.

BEX by—Annie, twenty, good looking, and thoroughly domesticated.

HARRY by—Theresa, nineteen, medium height, considered very handsome and will have a fortune when she comes of age.

ALBERT by—Hettie, twenty-one, rather tall, dark hair and eyes, thoroughly domesticated, and would make a good wife.

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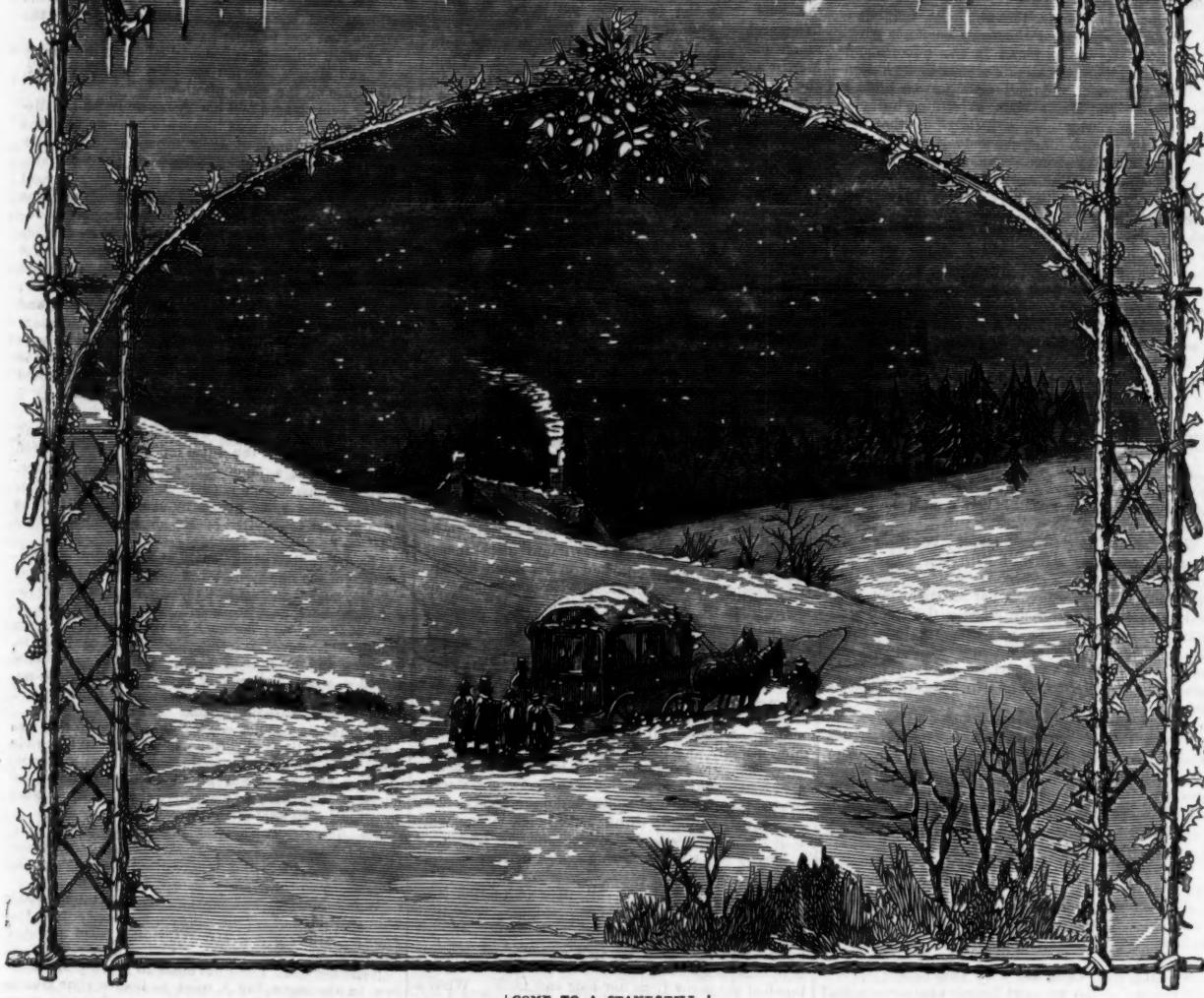
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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by G. A. SMITH

THE LONDON READER CHRISTMAS NUMBER



[COME TO A STANSTILL.]

MARGIE'S CHRISTMAS EVE.

FT was the day before Christmas—a cold still day, a leaden sky hanging like a gray curtain over the earth—a day cheerless enough to make poor little Margie Hepburn's heart sink, and her blue eyes fill with tears, as she sat pressing her cheek against the window of the railway carriage in which she was travelling, and trying vainly to catch a glimpse of the sun. Just one little ray of sunlight would have set her eyes and heart dancing again, for there never was a merrier little fairy than Margie; but the gray clouds hung lower and lower, and she couldn't help being miserable.

Poor child! She was all alone in the world, with nothing but her light heart and her trust in Provi-

dence to keep her from despair. Four years ago she had been left an orphan, and since then the cold, unwilling charity of her aunt had supported her at a boarding-school. She was going now to live with her aunt as governess. She had been travelling since an early hour in the morning, and cold, fatigue, and unhappiness had made her cheeks pale and her eyes languid; but the brave young heart kept hoping, hoping on, and trusting to the future to bring her peace and happiness.

"Now, I mean to stop thinking about myself, and look for something else that is bright, if I can't see the sun," she thought as the train stopped at a station. "There! I knew I should find something cheerful. What a pretty group of girls! And how happy they look, chatting and laughing with their friends. They are coming in, I declare. Now I shall have pleasant occupation in watching them."

The party entered; three young girls, all dark-eyed, blooming, and pretty, and five gentlemen,

young too, and all good-looking. The merriest set they were, and evidently, from their remarks, they were bound upon some very pleasant expedition. With a good deal of bustle and laughter they were at last seated, and, as they smiled and nodded farewell to their friends on the platform, the train went jarring and thundering on its way again.

Little Margie, seated just opposite the party, watched them quietly, and learned many things about them. She learned that the two brown-eyed girls with such dazzling complexions were "Alice and Emma," and one of the young men their brother Leslie. The tall, queenly girl with a skin like a magnolia bloom, and dark lashes drooping low over her black eyes, was "Adelaide"—Adelaide Brent, apparently, for a gentleman whom she called brother, and who was by far the gravest of the party, was addressed as Mr. Brent by the two hazel-eyed girls. Then there were George and Tom Hardy, two fun-loving youths with almost imperceptible moustaches,

and John Winston, a distinguished-looking young man, with very dark gray eyes and quiet, graceful manners. He always spoke in a low, subdued tone, but what he said was sometimes accompanied by a smile of intense amusement and a glint of the deep gray eyes. Then a shout of laughter was sure to follow from the rest of the party, and Margie would wish she had heard what he said.

Poor little Margie! The merry party opposite paid very little attention to her. A glance or two from their laughing eyes fell on her quiet figure, and wandered off again coldly and carelessly.

On rattled the train, over long bridges, high embankments, and dull-looking moors. Station after station was passed. The day was wearing on, and the train, after a prolonged shriek from the engine, dashed into a large station and stopped, its arrival being the signal for the deafening ringing of a bell, and a hoarse shout of "Ten minutes allowed for refreshment."

Refreshment! Margie thought with longing of the hot coffee and other necessary comforts which she imagined were to be found in the refreshment-room. She watched the stream of passengers hastening from the train, and half made up her mind to follow them. But it was such a jostling, hurrying crowd, and she was such a little thing that they might run over her. Then she had a nervous horror of pickpockets, who abounded, she had been assured, in such crowds. Besides, "refreshments" would cost money, and there was very little of that in her purse. So she laid her head upon her little satchel again, and prudently resolved to be satisfied with the slender luncheon of sandwiches which the good-natured schoolmistress had given her.

"Addy, shall we need any refreshment?" she heard Emmie ask.

"Why, no, I believe not," said Addie, languidly. "I am sure we breakfasted very comfortably before we started. I am not hungry yet. And then, my dear, I never eat in such places if I can help it."

"Neither do I; but I never can help it," said Tom Hardy, with a ridiculous grimace, as he moved towards the door.

The other gentlemen followed.

In a few moments a waiter came to the carriage door, bearing a tray with half-a-dozen cups of smoking hot coffee, which certainly had a most delightful aroma.

While Addy stirred and tasted her coffee, Mr. Winston, who had returned with the waiter, was carrying on a whispered conversation with Alice and Emmie, and Margie, to her astonishment, suddenly perceived from their glances that they were talking about her. She had scarcely time to be surprised, however, before Emmie, nodding a smiling assent apparently to a proposition of Mr. Winston's, came, with a cup of coffee in her hand, to Margie's side.

"Won't you let me offer you some coffee?" she said, in a tone which somehow managed to be an entreaty, an apology, and a caress all at once. "I am sure it will do you good; you look tired. Please take it."

Margie's pale cheeks had glowed at first with a little flame of wounded pride; but Emmie thought it was only shyness, and she continued:

"I wouldn't have ventured to offer it, but I saw you were alone."

So they didn't mean to be charitable, but only courteous. Margie could stand that. With a smile as bright as Emmie's, she took the cup and said, heartily:

"Thank you. You are very kind indeed."

Then the waiter brought Emmie another cup, and she drank her coffee standing by Margie's seat, and chatting pleasantly with her.

"Won't you sit down?" said Margie, motioning to the seat beside her.

And Emmie slipped into the seat.

So Emmie kept her seat, not only while the train halted, but long afterwards. "The freemasonry of youth" drew the two young girls together, and soon little confidences began to be exchanged, and merry laughs to ring out as clearly from Margie's lips as from Emmie's.

Margie discovered that Emmie's party were going nearly to the same destination as herself—that Emmie knew her aunt, Mrs. Delancey, and did not like her either. That fact Margie guessed from the girl's tell-tale face, not from anything she said.

Emmie told her that Alice and herself were going home from boarding-school to her sister's wedding.

"She is to marry Mr. Brent, Addie's brother, and all of us are to be bridesmaids and groomsmen. The wedding is to be the day after Christmas Day, and

there will be half-a-dozen grand parties to go to afterwards. It will be perfectly delightful!"

So Margie thought, too, and, with a feeling of envy she could not quite control, she contrasted the dreary prospect before herself—the cold welcome to a strange home, and her life of loneliness and toil—with Emmie's glowing description of the home-love, and luxury, and gaiety awaiting her. But in a moment she put away the feeling, and answered cheerfully the questions Emmie asked about herself. Her little history was soon told, and Emmie ran on again with her overflow of happy confidences.

The two girls were fast becoming friends, for neither of them was troubled with reticence, and before very long Emmie had found half-a-dozen little kindnesses to do for Margie. She had entreated her as a personal favour to eat some of the nice biscuit and cold chicken her own pretty travelling bag contained, had produced a bottle of Cologne, and assured Margie it was "better than water to take the dust from the face—just put some on your handkerchief and try it," and had watched with much interest the colour coming brightly into Margie's cheeks during this novel ablution. Then she brought over the lovely shawl Margie had admired, and proudly exhibited it as her own work.

In the midst of the animated conversation that followed concerning all manner of fancy work the train stopped at a station, and Leslie and George came in from another carriage to announce in an excited way that it was snowing fast, and the down train had brought news that a snow-storm had set in when they had started from the North. The news created some uneasiness among Emmie's party, and she went back to her seat to discuss the subject, leaving Margie to watch the snowflakes that went hurrying past the window, and to notice how the brown earth was gradually disappearing under a mantle of white. The train seemed suddenly to have plunged into a snow cloud, which grew more dense as they advanced, until earth and sky were hid from view by the thick, driving flakes, and the noise made by the rushing train seemed to grow dull and muffled.

As station after station was passed, the reports of the storm ahead of them grew more terrible. The day wore away, and the train crept heavily on, its speed constantly decreasing, and the stoppages at the stations growing longer. Margie's heart grew heavier than ever, but fortunately her eyelids grew heavier too, and she began to fall into little uneasy dozes, with her cheek pillowed on her satchel. She fell asleep even while thinking with dismay that the town where her aunt lived was twelve miles from the railroad station, and the road would probably be rendered impassable for the carriage which was to meet her. Emmie had said that an omnibus, which ran from the station to D— regularly during the summer, had been chartered for the use of her party, although it had long ceased to make its daily trips.

Margie wondered if they would go off merrily and thoughtlessly, and leave her to her fate. She dozed off, dreamed her aunt's carriage had overturned in a snowdrift, and she was buried in the snow, and started awake, to find her satchel fallen on the floor, a little snowflake stealing in through the crack in the window, and melting on her neck—and Mr. Winston's dark eyes fixed on her with a grave, curious expression.

It was so provoking and ridiculous a situation, that Margie blushed crimson as she caught the gentleman's eye, and then, with a sudden dignity, she sat up, untied her brown veil (her bonnet had all this time been suspended on a hook above her head), and brushed the snow from her hair and neck. What a wealth of lovely red-gold, waving hair rolled down on her shoulder as she unfastened the ugly veil! And what pretty white hands they were that caught it, and wound it hurriedly into a great knot at the back of her head.

Then she attempted to close the window more tightly, but with the strength of both hands she could not move it.

She looked up in great surprise as another hand was quietly placed upon the window,

and the "provoking thing" slid easily into its place.

Mr. Winston had come to her aid, and she gave him a shyly grateful look from her dark-fringed eyes and a murmured "Thank you," which ought to have rewarded him well for his trouble.

Again Margie dropped into an easy slumber, and this time she was roused from troubled dreams by the touch of gentle hands on her head. Emmie's smiling eyes met hers for a moment—something soft and warm interposed between her cheek and the hard satchel—a general sensation of comfort stole over her, and she slept again, with a scarlet and

purple shawl wrapped around her, and her head resting on a cushion made of its soft folds. She slept long and sweetly, while the train jolted on, the snow drifts deepened, the wind howled through the deep cuts, and the winter night came stealing on.

Margie could scarcely help thinking it part of her dreams when a voice roused her with the words, "We are near D— station. I think you'd better put on your bonnet."

It was her friend Emmie who spoke, and Margie attempted to smile back into the girl's bright face, but she was too bewildered and startled to speak or to do anything but rub her eyes. Then, with fingers that seemed fairly numb with sleepiness, she tied on her bonnet, picked up her bag, and followed Emmie and her friends. She shivered with the plunge into the snowy air, which roughly and effectually awakened her. Some one put out a hand to help her to the platform; some one else called out, "Come on, John; we are waiting," and she saw that Mr. Winston was again her helper. He walked up on the platform, and she looked around eagerly for the carriage that was to meet her.

The train whistled, and moved off along the snowy track, and Margie was left standing—a lonely, dark little figure on the white platform.

Snow everywhere met her eyes: snow on the distant mountains that rose like white domes into the sky, feathery plumes of snow crowning every dark pine tree in the dim woods all around the little station, great heaps of snow heaped in the narrow road that plunged into the masses of dark foliage and was lost to view; snow on the coal-laden wagons standing in a "siding"; snow on the roof of the omnibus that stood near the station, and on the backs of the sturdy horses that were harnessed to it, and that stamped and smoked as the flakes gathered on them; snow under Margie's little feet, and on her cloak, and in her eyes, and in the air she breathed. And there was no carriage waiting for her. The driver, who was standing by his horses, shook his head as she questioned him, and said "he didn't believe it would be possible for a carriage to come from D— for a week."

She looked around the wide waste of snow, and saw no house but the little building which served the purpose of a shop and a post office at once. A week in this dreary place! That was simply impossible. She must get on by some means. Was there no cart to be hired? No horse she could ride to D—?

The driver looked curiously at the troubled, childish face of the questioner, and shook his head again.

"No, miss," he said, "there ain't nothin' to be got about here, and 'twouldn't be possible to go in or on it if there was; not such weather as this. I am going on, however, if things hold together. That is, I am going to take a party of folks to Colonel Elliott's, a mile this side of D—. I don't see nothin' to hinder your going that far with them. I thought you were one of that party."

No, Margie was not one of "that party." She was a stranger to them all. She had no right to a vehicle hired by them, and she could not ask it as a favour. Besides, she could not go to Colonel Elliott's, of course. Was there no place here that she could stay in till her aunt sent for her?

Yes, the driver thought she could stay at Mrs. Simmons's. She was the station-master's wife, and lived in the little red brick cottage adjoining the station.

While Margie was making up her mind to ask shelter of Mrs. Simmons, a quick step came over the snowy platform, and Mr. Winston's voice sounded beside her.

"Excuse me. I did not mean to leave you standing in the snow, but I went to insure your trunks being taken off. There is a very comfortable room here. Will you join the ladies of my party, who are in it?"

He spoke in such a quiet, matter-of-fact voice, exactly as if he had been appointed by the railway company to look after unprotected ladies, and was apologizing for neglect of duty, and was so perfectly gentlemanly and unobtrusive in his manner, that even Margie's excessive pride and shyness could not take flight at being thus dependent upon the care of a stranger. She gave him another of those pretty, grateful "Thank you's" of hers, and went with him into the little footpath that connected the cottage and the station.

A confusion of gay, laughing voices guided her to the neat sitting-room where Mrs. Simmons was bustling about, very proud and glad to entertain Colonel Elliott's daughters and their friends. She made Margie welcome, too, for she was a kind, hospitable soul, and something in the girl's fair face and blue eyes went "straight to her heart" she said.

She took her into the bedroom, the pride of her

heart, which adjoined the sitting-room, and, giving her water to bathe her face, went back to the parlour again. Somehow, the sound of happy voices in the next room made Margie more lonely and wretched than she had ever felt in her life. Great tears plashed into the basin of water all at once, and, though she tried with all her might, she could not stop crying. Three times she went back to wash out the traces of weeping, and at last, when she thought her cheeks were dry, and she began to arrange her hair before the muslin-draped looking-glass, the very first glimpse of her piteous face made her tears flow faster than ever for very pity of herself.

"Poor little me! poor little me!" she felt like saying, just as she used to say when she was a tiny child, and wanted her sweet mother to pity and kiss her. That thought brought the tears trickling again, and Margie was just about to put her head down on the little toilet-table and give way to a burst of passionate, despairing sobs, when a sound in the next room attracted her attention and made her stop to listen.

Emmie's voice exclaimed:

"Girls, please be quiet! Leslie and Mr. Winston are calling us."

Emmie went to the door apparently to hear what they said, and a murmured conversation between her and the gentlemen followed. Then Margie heard again:

"Yes, we will be ready in fifteen minutes, or five if you say so. What did you say, Mr. Winston? Oh, certainly there will be room enough! I am so glad you mentioned it. But you know the omnibus isn't going to D—. However, that doesn't make any difference. We will make her stay with us till Mrs. Delauncey sends for her."

So they were talking about her, and planning a way out of all her difficulties for her. How kind it was, and yet how their kindness pained her! To be obliged to accept favours from people she had never seen till to-day was so galling to proud Margie that she felt like running desperately out into the snow, and going on, and on, and on, till she should sink down in some soft white drift and let the flakes cover her up and end her troubles and her life together. Then she was shocked at her own wickedness, and, with the sweet tenderness of a child, she bent her head to pray for pardon and for help in her loneliness.

In the next room they seemed unconscious that every word could be heard through the thin partition, for Emmie was saying, "Mr. Winston and Leslie want to know if we could give Miss Hepburn a seat with us. Of course we can."

"Oh!" sighed Addy, plaintively, "I suppose we must, but our nice party will be spoiled. Won't it do, Emmie, if we take a note to her aunt from her? It's Mrs. Delauncey's business to get her to D—."

"Gracious, Addy!" exclaimed Emmie, schoolgirl-like. "Leave the poor child here, with no way of getting to D— for a week perhaps! What are you talking about? Mamma would give as a good scolding if we did, wouldn't she, Alice?"

Alice agreed that she would, though she hesitated to disagree with the impulsive, magniloquent Addy.

How Margie's cheeks burned during this conversation! Her drops of tears were turned to sparks of fire, and it was hard to keep from confronting Addy like a little insulted queen, and assuring her that she need not be at all uneasy, the nice party should never be spoiled by her presence.

In the midst of her struggles against pride and temper, bright, warm-hearted Emmie came in to hurry her and to entreat, in her caressing way, that Miss Hepburn would go home with them, from whence she could easily reach her aunt's.

Margie yielded, secretly hoping that the driver could be induced to carry her on that night to D—; and in a few moments she found herself comfortably placed with Emmie and a large basket containing refreshments, which Mrs. Simmons had thoughtfully prepared. There was any quantity of room, for Leslie, and Tom, and George Hardy preferred climbing to the roof, where they shouted college songs, and frightened timid Alice by pretending to fall off every five minutes, and Mr. Winston, after the first half-mile of the road, took the seat beside the driver, Stephen Cross—than whom there never was a jollier fellow, by the way.

It was after sundown when the party left the station, but it was not dark, nor did the night promise to be a dark one, for, as Stephen Cross said, "it would be a full moon if it wasn't for them clouds, and, besides, the snow made it light enough for any man with a head to drive," and he repeated his favourite expression, "he would get through if things held together." So they rolled on, the vehicle swinging easily from side to side, the wheels crushing noiselessly into the soft snow, and the noble horses spring-

ing forward as if they enjoyed the performance, while, from the singers on the roof, a jolly chorus echoed for miles around.

A very pleasant state of affairs if it could only have lasted! But the level stretch of road through the meadows was soon passed, and then came a series of hills, up and down, up and down, each hill steeper and longer than the last. The conveyance alternately plunged and rolled, and its progress grew slower and the halts more frequent. And all the time the snow came down in one vast, blinding cloud, which was hurled hither and thither by the wind, so that it seemed to come from all points of the compass, and actually, as Tom said, to be "snowing them up" at times.

The gentlemen were now obliged to get out at every hill, and to trudge knee deep in the track of the plunging vehicle. But still "things held together," even when they began to encounter fallen trees, which were broken by the weight of snow and lay stretched across the road, and which required the united strength of all the men in the company to remove them.

The ladies meanwhile sat quietly inside, never doubting the ability of Stephen Cross to "get through," and answering the merry shouts of their escorts with laughter as gay.

But when three hours had been passed in this way even Emmie, the merriest of them all, became weary and silent, and Addy only spoke to complain.

The middle seat, which she had chosen as the most comfortable, she now pronounced cold and hard and Margie's kind offer to change with her was at once accepted.

So it happened that when, during one of the long halts, Mr. Winston came to the door and opened it just wide enough to permit his voice to enter, it was Margie who answered his questions.

"Every one is asleep but me," she said, in a low tone.

"Very wise," he answered, with a laugh. "Why are you not asleep too, Miss Hepburn? You are not afraid?"

"No. But I cannot sleep. Is it very cold out there?"

"Not very. At least, we manage to keep warm with hard work," he replied.

"I wish we could help you," said Margie. "I feel as if it were so selfish in us to sit here, warm and safe, while you are out in this storm."

"We are quite contented with knowing that you are warm and safe. Don't be troubled about us," for he somehow guessed from her tone that she was troubled.

"Are we nearly at our journey's end?" she asked.

"Well, no. To tell the truth, we are only a little more than half way. But don't be discouraged."

"Are the horses very tired?" asked Margie.

"Rather. But they can pull us through, I think. This is a dreary Christmas Eve for you, Miss Hepburn."

"I don't mind it," said Margie, quietly.

In fact it was not drearier for Orphan Margie, out in the wild, stormy night, than it would have been in the shelter of her aunt's house.

Fire and lamps cannot make light and warmth in the heart, and the kindness of strangers was better than the coldness of her who should have been kind.

"We are stopping a long time," Mr. Winston said, "to rest the horses. We have a long hill ahead of us now. I'd advise you to go to sleep, too."

Then he closed the door, and with a snort and plunge the sturdy horses brasted the waves of snow on the steep mountain road.

With many stoppages, much shouting (which waked the slumbering inside passengers), and a great deal of "prizing" at the wheels with rails taken from a fence, which was fast disappearing under the snow, the top of the hill was reached, and the descent began.

"That's over!" said Emmie, in a relieved tone, and she sank back amongst the shawls and cushions for another nap.

The other girls were following her example, when a violent lurch, a shout from the driver, a crash, and the vehicle lay on its side in a gully, while the horses struggled like mad to escape from the tangled harness.

But Stephen Cross, though standing on his head in a snowdrift, still held the reins, and in a moment the frantic animals were seized and held by three or four pairs of strong arms, each busied in obeying the driver's directions:

"Out the traces! Out everything that holds them! They'll have us over the bank in a second if you don't."

When the horses were released, and stood trembling and starting in the road, the next care was to release the terrified inside passengers.

To do them justice, the girls had "behaved like bricks," as Tom expressed it.

No one screamed except Alice, who was thrown into Margie's lap, and uttered shriek after shriek at first, till Margie silenced her by a quick:

"For mercy's sake, don't scream! You will only frighten the horses, and make matters worse."

Leslie dragged open the door, with a breathless inquiry:

"Are all the rest of you killed? I don't hear anybody screaming but Alice."

And the peal of laughter that greeted this speech assured him that no one was seriously injured. But, though no one was hurt, it was apparent that very serious mischief had happened.

When the girls had been lifted from the vehicle, and stood laughing and shivering in two feet of snow, Stephen Cross walked round the overturned conveyance, and solemnly came back to give his verdict.

"She's off the handle now, anyhow. Things ain't held together. Ladies, I'm sorry for it, but we shan't get through to-night."

In the dismayed silence that followed he went on to say:

"You see, I hadn't counted on having whole trees flung at the leaders' heads, as that one was that lies across the road there. It frightened the horses, and they slewed round right towards the edge of the mountain. I hadn't no fancy for taking a load of passengers down a precipice a hundred feet high, so I slewed 'em the other way, and we went into that gully quick as winking. There ain't no harm done—oh, no! Nothing but a wheel ground up against a rock like it had been through a coffee-mill—a blessing it wasn't one of your pretty heads—the axle-tree broken, and—the devils to pay everywhere!"

And Stephen Cross waved his arms wildly, as if words failed him wherewith to express the utter ruin and smash that had taken place.

Here was a situation! Nine o'clock of winter's night, a wild mountain road, a fierce storm raging, and ten people, up to their knees in snow, blown about by the driving wind, and stiffening already with the cold.

"Is there a blacksmith's shop at the foot of the hill?" asked Mr. Winston.

"Yes," said Leslie, "but there's no use trying to mend anything to-night."

"Of course not," exclaimed Stephen Cross. "But Jim Bailey has a snug house down there that will shelter us all, and my advice is that you all travel down thereas quick as you can. It ain't more than fifty yards. We couldn't have broken down in a better place. What's that about the trunks, Miss Alice? Bless the women! you can't frighten nor freeze the love of their clothes out of 'em. The trunks won't get hurt. I looked at 'em. There covered up tight in the boot—not a snow-flake can get to 'em. Now, I'll go ahead with the horses, and break the way, and you all follow after me."

It was a wild journey. The girls could not keep their feet in the wind, which came tearing down the mountain, bringing miniature avalanches with it, and Margie, who, as usual, found herself the special care of Mr. Winston, could only cling to his arm, and suffer herself to be almost carried through the drifts.

When they reached the blacksmith's cottage all was dark and still, and Stephen Cross's shouts and knocks were for a long time unanswered.

"Dnat the man!" growled Stephen, pausing to listen for an answer.

"I heard something then," cried Margie, who pressed close to the door. "Something like a little child crying. Listen!"

"It was the wind, I reckon. Well, I'll try again," And he shouted aloud:

"Jim! Jim! Bailey! it's me, Stephen Cross, and a load of other passengers out here freezing to death! Open your door, man!"

This time, after a pause, a little, faint voice called, timidly, from within:

"Is that you, Mr. Cross?"

"Yes, it's me, little Julie. Let me in, quick."

The door opened slowly, and a little girl appeared, with a frightened face, holding back with one hand two smaller children, who clung to her skirts.

"Hullo, Julie! where's father?" asked Stephen, at the sight of whom all the children smiled and the door opened wide instantly.

"Father's gone to grandpa's. He went last night and he hasn't come back, and there's nobody here but me and the children. So I was afraid to open the door at first," said Julie, clinging to Stephen Cross's hand and looking shyly at the strangers who entered.

But in a few moments she forgot her shyness, and was busy throwing fresh coals on the fire that glowed in the great fireplace, and setting chairs for the ladies with instinctive grace and courtesy. Up

sprang a glorious blaze, lighting every corner of the large kitchen with its crimson glow and warming thoroughly the chilled travellers who crowded round it.

"Now, Julie," said Stephen Cross, who seemed perfectly at home, "you see this basket? Well, there's plenty of supper in here—cold chicken and so on—for these ladies and gentlemen, but we'd like some coffee very much."

He left the house, beckoning several of the young men to follow.

The party remaining in the house were soon very busy getting supper, under the directions of Margie, who flitted about like a fairy, doing everything she attempted with wonderful grace and dexterity, and issuing her orders like a general on the field of battle. It was amusing to see how even Addy, the magnificent, went to her humbly for orders, and obeyed them with slavish precision.

When Stephen Cross and his party returned, having first made a trip to the vehicle to bring down all the shawls and cushions, and then sheltered the horses in a shed adjoining the smithy, they found George and Emmie busily engaged in furthering the culinary operations, while Alice watched the boiling coffee-pot. Addy and Leslie were setting a table, and Margie, with flushed cheeks and bright eyes, was everything at once, showing everybody the right way to do everything, and exciting the open-mouthed wonder and admiration of little Julie and the other children. She had made friends with them at once, and Julie had told her all about the long night and day they had passed "since father went away and the snow began to fall. They had been so frightened, and had had nothing to eat but some bread, for she couldn't reach the meat that hung on the rafters in the store-room. She was so glad when Mr. Cross came, but she wished father knew all about it, for he would be frightened at their being all alone in the house. Father had gone to bring home little brother Johnny from grandfather's, 'cause to-morrow was Christmas, and they wanted Johnny at home. She s'posed father would come early to-morrow morning."

Somehow the child's story filled her hearers with vague apprehensions, which none of them liked to give utterance to. When Stephen Cross came in Margie whispered her fears to him, but was met by the assurance that "Jim Bailey was a prudent man, and wasn't likely to do nothing rash. He'd turn up all right."

So they went on with their preparations for supper, and a merrier meal than that supper was, when it came, never was partaken of. They appointed Margie mistress of ceremonies, as she had proved herself more capable than any one else of filling the position of housekeeper, and very gracefully she did the honours.

And just as they were rising from the table some one discovered that it was twelve o'clock, and Margie, starting up, declared they must "sing in Christmas morning," and sing in the open air, too, as Christmas carols should be sung. So she opened, the door wide, and lo! the flakes had ceased to fall, the clouds were flying away before the wind, and the heaped and drifted snow lay "sparkling to the moon" that shone calmly down upon the quiet earth, while here and there, in the sky, a large white star glimmered faintly forth, too brilliant to be outshone by the radiant moon.

Then, on the crystal air, went ringing like a chime of bells a chorus of clear young voices in the sweet old Christmas hymn :

"While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The glory of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around."

It was Margie who led the hymn in a wonderful voice, so fresh, so sweet, and so full, that the others could scarcely sing for listening, and when the last liquid note had floated up towards the stars the listeners stood looking up as if there must be angels hovering over them.

A long, deep silence followed, which Addy was the first to break. Going up to Margie, her clear cheek flushing, and her great dark eyes shining with tears, she touched the young girl's brow with her beautiful lips, and said, gently :

"Child, you make me love you with your lovely voice."

Margie smiled faintly in return. She was bending forward listening to some incensed sound that came home on the fitful wind. Was it fancy? She turned, and, catching little Julie's arm, drew her softly to the door.

"Julie, listen!" she whispered. "Don't you hear some one calling?"

The child listened intently, fixing her eyes meanwhile on Margie's face. The wind blew her black hair over her pale little face, and fluttered the dark

dress she wore, but still she listened with that look of painful, frightened intensity, while Margie's hand still grasped her arm, and she too listened breathlessly for the expected sound.

A picture for an artist's eye was the group in that doorway. Glorious, imperial Addy, with the soft light in her eyes, her purple dress sweeping round her, and touching the snow at her feet; fair little Margie, with her golden-bronze hair falling and glittering over her shoulders, and a scarlet shawl half trailing on the floor, half clinging round her slender figure. Behind these two a flood of warm light from the Christmas fire, glowing and sparkling, and half revealing other young and graceful figures in the background; in front of them the cold, glittering moonlight, the wide expanse of snow, and the little pale, wistful child.

John Winston, standing outside in the shadow of a great tree, was smiling to see how fair it was, and was already in fancy transferring it to canvas, when little Julie threw up her head with the look of a startled fawn.

"It is father!" she whispered, hoarsely. "He is calling me!"

With her tiny hand held up for silence she listened again; and once, only once, from the ravine, a hundred feet below them, came a low, wavering, wordless cry, almost borne away by the light wind that shook the feathery snow from the trees.

Stephen Cross started up at the sound, and with all the strength of his powerful lungs sent forth a shout that echoed far and wide, and then paused for the answer. None came, and little Julie wrung her hands and sobbed in wild terror :

"It is father," she said. "He is down there in the deep snow. Oh, please, Mr. Cross, get him out! He will die in the cold."

Without a word Stephen Cross dashed into the house, seized half-a-dozen flaming "light wood" brands, and came hurrying out again. As many ready hands seized the torches, and following the lead of Stephen Cross, the men hurried down by a circuitous route into the deep ravine where the shadows lay black as ink.

The torches flared redly against the moonlit snow, and when the bottom of the ravine was reached the shadows fled before their light. To little Julie, kneeling on the edge of the precipice, with Margie's arms around her, and Margie's soft voice whispering hope and courage in her ear, it seemed a long time before the torches ceased flashing restlessly to and fro, and gathered at last around one central point.

But at last a shout from below told them the search had been successful, and then, by the winding path, toiling patiently through the deep snow-drifts, came the group of men, bearing slowly—oh, so slowly! a dark and heavy burden with them. Up from the black shadows into the fair moonlight, through the wide-open cottage door, and into the light of his own hearth-fire they carried the cold, senseless form of the blacksmith, and his little daughter gathered his head in her arms, and rocked backwards and forwards in grief too deep for words or tears. Many a time pale little Julie had looked on death, and she thought it had come again to her humble home; but she was wrong.

"Not this time, Julie," said Stephen Cross, cheerfully. "He ain't off the handle yet, child. Here's his heart beatin' under my hand like a sledge-hammer a'ready. Not so close to the fire, gen'l'men, though I believe he ain't so much frozen as dead beat, and stunned, with a long tramp and a fall somehow."

And so it proved. At the end of an hour the blacksmith sat in his arm-chair by the fire, very feeble and dizzy, but happy as a king, with Julie sleeping at his feet, and the two curly-headed cherubs sleeping beside him, while he ate his supper and told his adventures.

The snow had detained him at his father's until he became so uneasy about the children at the cottage, that he set out, in spite of entreaties and warnings, to come to them. Taking a short cut through by-roads well known to him, he came into the main road near his house, but seeing no light from the windows (poor Julie had closed the wooden shutters when night came on), he had wandered out of the path, missed his footing, fallen over the edge of the precipice, and only been saved from death by the vast drift of snow into which he had sunk.

Here, stunned, chilled, and bewildered by the storm and darkness, he had groped about, vainly trying to find his way out of the ravine, and conscious that his shouts could not be heard above the roar of the storm, and, at last, he sank down to die, utterly unable to move another step. But when he had lain a little while, with his eyes closed and his heart beating slower and slower, suddenly he heard music in the air above him.

"Yes, you may believe me or no, just as you please," said Jim, sturdily, "but I heard the angels singing. It was like the music in church, only

—wester than any they make there, and the chorus were rolling away from before it, and the moon shining like silver in the sky. Then I gathered up strength to call my little Julie here. I called her three times, and, when I had done it, I was sorry, for I was afraid she would try to come down to me, and be lost in the snow. Then I tried to raise myself up again, and in a minute the world seemed to spin round and round, and I didn't know any more till I heard Stephen Cross say 'He's all right now!' —and so I am all right."

"And it was Miss Margie and all of them you heard singing," said laughing, crying Julie, looking up at Margie with a face of half-adoration. "But I should think the angels don't sing any sweater than she does," added Julie, softly.

"Anyhow, it was the singing that saved my life," said Jim, with a tremble in his rough voice. "I was falling asleep in the snow when I heard it, and when a man falls asleep there it is apt to be a long sleep—a long sleep, little Julie."

And Jim stroked the child's hair, and gazed musingly into the fire, while Julie bent forward and timidly touched Margie's hand with a touch that was a blessing.

"There ain't angels only in heaven. I think there's some of 'em on the earth, too," said Stephen Cross, nodding sagely, and pointing his speech with so direct a look at Margie that she and every one else laughed outright. But there was no one to contradict Stephen Cross, for somehow the girl's sweet ways and sunny temper, and patience, and gentleness had won every heart there.

Orphan Margie, who was so lonely that morning, had many warm friends now. As she lay down at last to sleep on the bed of cushions, and shawls, and piles of clean hay, which had been spread for the girls in one room of the cottage, she thanked Heaven for the friends she had found and for a happy Christmas Eve. And the last sound she heard was Emmie saying, in a sleepy voice :

"How funny things are! I know you so well now, Margie, that I can hardly believe I never saw or spoke to you in my life till Mr. Winston said, this morning, 'Miss Emmie, will you carry a cup of coffee for me to that little girl over there? She has such a sweet, tired face. She looks like a snow maiden, and if I go near her I shall expect to see her vanish away in a wreath of snow.'"

And Margie's dreams were none the less fair and pleasant for hearing this.

There was a merry breakfast in the morning, and a safe and pleasant journey to their destination—for the indefatigable Stephen Cross, aided by the blacksmith, had repaired the damaged vehicle—and a joyful welcome from Colonel Elliott, his handsome, stately wife, pretty Sue, the bride elect, and a host of rosy-cheeked little brothers and sisters. She was an older edition of Emmie—little taller, a little graver, and just as pretty and warm-hearted.

They would not let Margie speak of going to D—. Emmie and Alice hung round her and entreated, and Sue urged her to stay, and finally Mrs. Elliott put an end to the controversy by sending a messenger to inform Mrs. Delancey that her niece was at Clifton, but she would not be given up till after the wedding, when Mrs. Delancey, who was expected to be present, might carry her home with her.

So Margie was one of the wedding guests, and not only that but, one of the bridesmaids having been prevented from coming, Margie was seized upon to fill her place. Her plea that she had no white dress was laughed at. A vapoury tulle of Sue's was taken in a little here and there, and found to fit her admirably; and Emmie clapped her hands with delight as she saw how lovely the little "snow maiden" looked with her white robes and a silver arrow in her curls.

When the wedding ceremony was over Mrs. Delancey raised her eyeglass, and said, graciously :

"Mrs. Elliott, may I ask the name of the bridesmaid with the remarkably beautiful hair and complexion—the young lady next your daughter Alice?"

And Mrs. Elliott, who had learned—no one knows how, but she knew everything—Mrs. Delancey's intentions with regard to her orphan niece, answered by leading the young lady forward and smilingly introducing her as :

"Your niece, Miss Margaret Hepburn, Mrs. Delancey."

Mrs. Delancey was a little taken aback, and as she kissed Margaret's cheek with much show of affection she was thinking deeply. She continued the same train of thought afterwards, when she watched Margie attracting the admiration of the whole room—which was in fact the whole county, for nearly every "county family" had some member of it present at the wedding festivities, for Colonel Elliott's house was a proverbially delightful place. She

listened to Margie's exquisite voice, studied her graceful, sweet manners, and came to a conclusion. Here was a beauty of the first order—a girl whose face alone was an ample fortune.

She was not to be kept in the backgrounds, hid away in a dingy school-room, but must be "brought out" with all the increased lustre that a beautiful setting could give to a diamond of the first water. She must add to the family grandeur by making a brilliant match, and Mrs. Delancy's heart beat high when she saw that already the first "catch" in the room, John Winston, wealthy, distinguished, accomplished, and handsome, was bestowing the most devoted attentions upon her beautiful niece.

So the Fates—not always cruel—willed that Margie's Christmas holidays should be a dream of splendour and gaiety—of lovely new dresses, of parties without number, and admiration without end, till Margie's little head would have been turned if all these things had not charmed her less than the light in one pair of dark eyes, and the low tones of a voice that was dearer than all the world besides.

That was a gay winter in D—, and the next summer was fully as pleasant and eventful.

Croquet parties, archery meetings, picnics under the pleasant and fragrant summer woods passed the time away delightfully.

Then there were visits to watering places, both to those of the fashionable London-supper-mare kind, and to those of the quiet, cosy order.

Nor was a summer yachting cruise forgotten, and Margie and a gay party made the round of the fair Mediterranean coast towns which are so richly endowed with beauty.

Naples, with its sapphire crescent bay—the city the proverb bids you see, then die; fair Venice; Genoa, of the olden merchant princes, afforded her incessant interest and enjoyment.

Nor were their travels ended here. Margie's sparkling eyes looked upon the "rocky Salamis," whence the Persian monarch witnessed the Grecian triumph, and those bright eyes were bedewed with tears when they gazed upon the dark waters of that fatal spot, hallowed for age by the loves of Hero and Leander, where Love "forgot to save the hope of Sestos' daughter."

When summer drew to a close and the winter season was again inaugurated, Margie was perhaps more caressed and feted than ever.

Amid the intoxicating round of ever-varying pleasure brought about by the opportunities she enjoyed of personal communion with congenial associates in the frequent parties and réunions to which she was constantly invited as an honoured and welcome guest, Margie had but scant time afforded her to reflect upon what might have been her lot had not the good genius of her life sent the loving and loveable Emmie with her companions to be fellow passengers with her on that memorable and fatal journey.

She realized that she never could feel thankful enough, however, for that happy meeting—without which her life might have been a constant succession of indignity, drudgery and humiliation, for Mrs. Delancy was one of those people with whom utility and expediency are paramount considerations. The education she had grudgingly bestowed upon her niece had had this twofold object in view. It was expedient that her niece should be trained in the conventional accomplishments of the time in order that her utility might in due course be gratefully manifested for the benefit of Mrs. Delancy's belongings.

But circumstances had with irresistible force changed the current of Margie's destiny.

It was deemed expedient by her aunt to go with the tide and catch a reflected brilliancy by fostering the attachment which had unmistakeably sprung up between her niece and Mr. Winston.

This attachment, too, seemed to be the fulfilment of the desire of every one of the merry party—to say nothing of Margie herself—who had been associated together in that never-to-be-forgotten snow-storm.

The dénouement which ultimately took place was not altogether unexpected by those who carefully watched the current of events.

"Have you heard the news, Jim?" asked Mr. Cross, drawing up his coursers before the smithy one sunny morning in June.

"What is it?" asked the blacksmith, wiping his brow.

"Well, one wedding makes many, they say. Here's young Mr. Elliott going to marry that pretty Miss Addy Brent. Fine girl, after all, but just a little rusted. And Miss Margie Hepburn, the blessedest little girl that ever stepped, is going to marry Mr. Winston. It is a good match, too, and I don't know any other man I'd say that for."

"Well, I must say I kind of suspected that," said Jim, smiling, "when they came ridin' by here together last week, and my Julie gave Miss Margie

them wild roses that grow down in the ravine where I fell that night. Pretty pink things they are, 'bout the colour of her cheeks, as Julie says. Miss Margie is so much above other women—so like an angel, I may say—that we should not think any man worthy of her, except Mr. Winston, whom we all respect and esteem.

"It's been in my mind ever since that same night. I have always heard that everything was for the best, and I s'pose the use of the thunderiest snow-storm I ever saw was to bring them two people together, that mightn't ever have seen each other without it. But I don't care about having a hand in match-makin' of that sort every winter," and Stephen Cross touched up his horse and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

M. F. B.

Reid. Ah! be seated, Miss Evaline. A word aside Mr. Reid."

He drew the old man to the other side of the room, the old man trembling—he all eagerness.

"Tell me—she has come with you, Tom Reid, to tell me in person that she accepts me? ha!—that she will be my wife—eh?"

"Indeed, Mr. Archer, I have not dared to ask her. I—tried to approach the subject—but I had not the courage. You know, I was always a very timid man," replied the old man, older in misfortune than in years, and shrinking from the fierce light that leaped suddenly to the keen eyes of the questioner.

"Coward! not to dare to speak boldly even to your own daughter!"

"It is because she is my daughter," said the old man, shivering and cowering.

"Then why is she here? Then why have you led her into this office?"

"Because I dared not come alone, and say to you that which must be said, and I dared not—"

Archer finished the sentence with a triumphant sneer, and said:

"You dared not stay away. But you have kept me waiting, and since she is here I will waste no more time, but to the point at once. Of course she knows that I love her—love her madly!"

"I do not know. Have you ever told her, Mr. Archer?"

"No, but she is a woman. A woman's eyes can see the love of a man even when he tries to conceal it, and I have not tried to conceal mine."

"True, but when a woman loves—"

"Ha!"

"She has no eyes to see the love of any but him whom she loves."

"She—Evaline loves some one? His name?"

"It must be told," muttered the old man, trembling under the angry glare of the threatening face before him, and not daring to glance towards his daughter. "There must be an end to everything, and—well, she loves your cashier, William Herkert."

"My cashier! My servant!—for what more is he than my servant?" growled the amazed money-broker. "He has had the audacity—do you hear? the audacity to demand a private interview—mark that word, 'demand,'" as he drew a crumpled note from his pocket, and pointed at its contents with finger quivering with rage. "Ha! I demand a private interview with Mr. Simon Archer, at his house—mark you—at his house!" Not here, at my office, but at my house, in my library, he means—"at nine o'clock this evening." The upstart! And he has the additional audacity to be beloved by one whom I have sworn to make my wife! Do you think I shall give her to him?"

The old man, feeling the iron hand of this fierce and powerful man crushing his feeble arm, uttered a sharp cry of pain.

"Father, dear father," exclaimed Evaline, alarmed by this piteous cry, and rushing to his side.

"Sir, he is an old man, and you have dared to hurt him. Shame!"

"Oh, a thousand pardons, pardon from him and you, my dear young lady," said Archer, with restrained warmth and contempt. "I did not intend to hurt him. But of course you knew why your father desired your company hither. I may as well come to the point at once. I desire to be married man-to-morrow. Ha! ha! it's Christmas Eve, you know, and a right jolly party could be got together by ten o'clock."

Simon Archer showed his white teeth, rubbing his soft hands briskly together, and leaning his tall frame forward, glancing triumphantly from under his heavy beetling brows from father to daughter alternately and rapidly.

There was a long silence, and then Evaline said:

"I do not know or care to know what you mean, sir. I did not know that my father was coming here. He is feeble and timid, and never stir from home at night unless I am with him. Let us go home, father. This man must be a madman."

"Why? Because I love you, Evaline Reid? Yes, that is what makes the most of men simply madmen—love for angels like you. I want a wife, Miss Evaline—you—and to be married to-morrow—Christmas Day. You stare. Well, perhaps it is sudden. Blame your father. I told him to tell you—five months ago, I told him."

"Come, father," cried Evaline, alarmed, and leading her father towards the door. "Come, we must go home."

"Not yet!" exclaimed Archer, bounding to the door and looking it, and facing his two prisoners with a face that was all domino. "I must tell you that which this old coward has not dared, he says, to tell you—something that may serve to

CHRISTMAS DAYS OF OLD.

THE Christmas days, the merry days,
The Christmas days of old,
Will not return to you or me,
Though many years unfold.
Remember, sister, that gay time,
When all was careless mirth;
Though other joys we yet may share,
That one has pass'd from earth.
Did not the thought of that bright day
Each childhood cloud remove?
Did not each eye upon us beam
With more than wonted love?
And many a gift was then bestow'd,
And many a hope express'd;
Oh, sister, those were happy hours,
And prized beyond the rest!
The sun shone warmer on that day,
The air seem'd far more light;
The robin's carol was more sweet,
Each blade and twig more bright.
Remember, sister, to our ear
How pleasant were the chimes,
That call'd us to the House of Prayer,
At this most bless'd of times.
All the long—absent ones were home,
Young voices raised the song;
And older friends their age forgot,
Our pleasures to prolong.
And gaily look'd our cottage then,
Deck'd out with holly bough;
Oh, sister, think upon those days,
Not thus we keep them now.
But few short years have pass'd since
—then,
Yet childhood now is flown;
Our thoughts and feelings are all changed,
And other pleasures known.
A change, too, has come o'er our lot,
And alter'd are our ways;
Yes, sister, do we well to weep
O'er bygone Christmas days!

THE MIDNIGHT MISTAKE.

CHAPTER I.

Not many years ago there lived in one of our northern cities a money-broker, named Simon Archer, a man past middle age, of tall and active frame, thin, elastic, and as cold as a sword-blade. He was unmarried, and seemed to have no tie that allied him to the passions of other men, save that of greedy and remorseless avarice.

This man, on Christmas Eve, 1867, was alone in his private office, passing to and fro with a quick, impatient stride, and over flashing an angry, eager glance towards the golden clock on the mantel.

The clock struck eight, and Simon Archer halted suddenly.

"He makes me wait!" he snarled, his white teeth gleaming between his sneering lips. "He makes me wait. He should have been here fifteen minutes ago. Ah, you dare steal my time!"

A tapping at the door interrupted him, and he turned with a fierce scowl to greet the man he had expected.

The door opened at a timid touch. A pale, care-worn, white-haired old man crept rather than walked into the office, and at his side followed a fair and beautiful girl, just blooming into lovely womanhood.

A flash of evil triumph glared across the dark face of Simon Archer as he recognised the old man and his companion. But in an instant this expression vanished from his treacherous visage, and left it smirking and smiling.

"I am rejoiced to see you, Mr. Reid—and, ah! doubly rejoiced to see you, Miss Evaline—a merry Christmas to you! Ha! you have made me wait, Mr.

humble so proud a lady. There trembles your father—why?"

"Mr. Archer," begged the old man, clasping his thin and quivering hands, and almost sinking to his knees, "do not, for Heaven's sake, tell her. Ah! do not force my own child to—despise me! You won't do that, Simon Archer? Could you, Simon? I saved your life once, Simon—more, your good name, Simon. You would not destroy all the happiness I have left?"

"Father, dear father!" exclaimed Evaline, bursting in her beautiful form between her father and Archer, but gazing with scornful defiance at him, while she spoke with a haughtiness that tortured the soul of the broker. "Father, if at any time, before or since your daughter was born, you did anything that you would not now do, anything that may have put you in the power of this base, bad man, do not think your daughter can ever love you less than she does now. At least, my father," she added, pressing her lips to his withered cheeks, "since I have known him my father has done nothing evil—nothing not good!"

"True, thank Heaven! my noble child," sobbed the poor old man, whose once proud and daring spirit had been crushed by a crime of which this tale will soon speak. "What I did was before you were born."

"And has been unpunished, till I surrender you to the law!" snarled Simon Archer.

"Unpunished!" screamed the old man, white and rigid with a sudden fierceness. "Unpunished—do you dare tell me, when every breath I have drawn since that day of sin has been a continuation of mental horror; every heart-throb a curse sounding in my breast; every day an agony; every night a purgatory; all my dreams furies? Unpunished! See me withered before my forty-fifth year; look! the face, the form, the infirmities, the cowardice, the feeblemess of a man of eighty in me, and I not forty-five years old—good Heaven! not an old as you are, Simon Archer, but looking older by twenty years than your father who died the other day. Unpunished! my very marrow scorched by hot remorse; my hair blanched and thin; my form bent and withered; all shrunk and shrivelled, and smitten with the blight of conscious guilt. Ah! it would be well for me were I dead—and you tell me I am unpunished! You—"

"Enough of this raving, old idiot!" sneered Archer, clenching his fists, pacing to and fro, grinding his teeth, and beating his breast with his hands. "Silence! you infuriate me—do you hear? you infuriate me. You committed a crime, that crime, you know you did, and I have stood between you and the law; you know that. You smile, do you? Ha! am I jesting?"

Jesting!—not with that hard, cruel face all white with wrath, and the thin lips livid and snarling up from the sharp, gleaming, wolfish teeth.

"Is it true, dear father?" murmured Evaline, clinging to the trembling man, or rather upholding him.

"True; my life is in his hands, Evaline," he sobbed on her shoulder.

"And you can save him, sir?"

"By becoming my wife, dear Evaline, to-morrow, Christmas Day."

"And if I do, what security shall we, my father and I, have that hereafter you will not surrender him up to the law?" demanded Evaline, cold and rigid in her woe and dark resolve.

"All the proofs of his guilt are in my possession, Evaline, even the least that might stir a breath against his fair name; the instant I clasp your hand to your husband, Evaline, I give you these proofs."

"It will be my life for his," murmured Evaline, a thrill of anguish darting through her soul. "Oh, Willie, darling, I must give you up for this cruel man. To-morrow, Christmas Day, we were to wed, dear Willie, life of my heart—and to-morrow I must be the wife, oh, horror! of this base man!"

"Louder! I do not hear what you say, Evaline!" whispered Simon Archer. "Do you consent? It is to save your father from that?" and with a sharp suddenness he pointed at a coil of rope that chanced to be at her feet.

"Yes! to save my father! Oh, Heaven, give me strength! I consent—I consent!" and, with a sad, gurgling scream, the poor girl fell into her father's arms in a swoon.

Sudden power swelled the feeble arms of Tom Reid, and raising her, he bore her to the office lounge and laid her upon it.

Then, sinking upon his knees before the exulting Archer, whose eyes sparkled as they flashed over the glorious beauty of her recumbent form, he clasped his hands and sighed:

"You will spare her, Simon Archer? See, merely speaking of it has nearly driven life from her heart, Simon. I saved you from ruin once, Simon—you

have not forgotten that! You will not crush her soul as you have mine—"

"You are a dotard, Tom Reid! What! resign this treasury of all that is beautiful in women to my discharged—to that cursed upstart, William Herbert! Never! Come, simpleton—you could not make more absurd opposition were she your own child—as she believes she is. She is not your daughter, idiot! This is part of our compact, dotard; she has consented. Are you now to resist?"

"Yes! I am now to resist!" cried Reid, rising to his feet with sudden energy. "It is true that she is not my child—and if she were 'twould give me no right to barter her life for mine—gold for dross—virtue and youth for vice and infamy! I resist! Do your worst, heartless villain that you are! Let loose the hounds of the law upon me! Curse you and them! They may strangle me to death, Simon Archer, but may I die a thousand times ere Evaline becomes your wife!"

"Bah! think of riches, Tom Reid!"

"Strip me to my bones, I say! Ay, and grind my bones to powder—it's little more than bones you've left me, Simon Archer! She shall not become your wife!"

"You rave! Think of life and good name, and the fortune I shall give you, Tom Reid!"

"I think only of her—of Evaline—who thinks I am her father."

"Think of yourself—of the rope, the death-sentence, the hooting of all men, Tom Reid!"

"I defy them all—I defy you!"

Tom Reid stood erect, and then one might know that in his prime he had been a tall and stately man. He looked so then as he turned upon his tyrant and defied him.

Simon Archer believed this passion a mere dying flame. He could afford to wait. This strength would quickly vanish from the withered veins, and leave Tom Reid more feeble and cowardly than before.

"Well, well," he said, carelessly, but with white lips and glaring eyes, "she revives—enough for tonight. Go home, I wish to meet Herbert at my house—it is nearly nine already. Dream over all you and I have said, Tom Reid—and there is nothing like a night in bed to cool down mad resolves. Tom Reid. Go! and be here again at ten—no! Christmas Day—with Evaline as a Christmas gift to me, Tom Reid, or by the blood of Charles Acton you shall be arrested as a murderer. On Christmas Day, Tom Reid!"

Simon Archer, hard-faced as a fiend again, strode to the door, unlocked it, threw it open, and Tom Reid and Evaline went out in silence.

Already all his feebleess, all his cowardice seemed to have come back on the soul and body of the withered man, and even upon the heart and face of the drooping maiden, who clung tremblingly to his withered arm.

"A happy Christmas Eve to you, Tom Reid," shouted Arthur, after them; "let my Christmas gift be yourself, sweet Evaline, and mine to you shall be the life of your father."

With this he locked his office door on the outside—passed into the inner office, where he found the door-keeper half-mad with impatience to be away, for the streets were thronged and gay with the joyous sights and sounds of Christmas Eve.

"Peter, one commission for you, and then you may run to your home."

"Thanks! they are waiting for me, sir. I know they are. We're to have a gay party at my house—dancing, singing, and wine—Oh, sir, a regular old fashioned sort of a Christmas Eve."

"Yea, yea, of course. Earn this gold piece I give you. Go, and Jo-6, the Spaniard, you can put your hand on him in less than one hour, Peter. If he is at my house before midnight you shall receive another."

"Ha, ha! A happy Christmas to you, sir!" shouted the delighted doorkeeper after his master, as the latter sprang into a carriage and was whirled away. "What a generous man he is, to be sure!"

CHAPTER II.

It was striking nine as Simon Archer entered his library, in his costly mansion, where he had revelled for years in the wealth and luxury of a princely income.

He had scarcely cast off his cloak when a servant entered, saying:

"Mr. William Herbert, sir," and on the instant retired, to make way for a tall and handsome, dark-faced young man, whose whole aspect spoke of stern uprightness and manly courage.

"You threatened me this morning," said Herbert, coming straight to the point, "with a law-suit, for the rent my mother owes you—an old claim, you said,

I have searched into it, and found that law, if not right, is on your side."

"You have come, then, to beg for time, William Herbert?"

"And if I have, sir?"

"You may return home, and tell your mother that on the day after to-morrow I shall seize all she has—on judgment obtained a year ago. My lawyer will receive instructions to serve it without delay. She may thank you for having provoked my enmity. This will make a joyous Christmas Day for you at home."

"Thanks. I have seen your lawyer and paid the judgment and costs. Here are my vouchers, Mr. Archer. We owe you not a shilling. You perceive also that your lawyer, acting upon your instructions to sell the house we have lived in for years, has sold it to me. I own the house now. We, mother and I, intend to spend a very merry Christmas Day in it to-morrow. As yet I have not told her the truth—that you have been a false friend, keeping back from her the estate rightfully hers and mine, of which you were left guardian by my father's will. To tell her would make her sad, for she has esteemed and respected you as a true friend. I shall lay the unpleasant truth before her the day after to-morrow. This will season your dinner, sir. For dessert, reflect that I have this day entered suit against you as a defaulter to the estate of William Herbert deceased, and that I have sworn to push you to the full extent of the law."

Simon Archer grinned with rage as he ran his eyes over the legal papers the young man placed defiantly on his table; then, looking at him with a sneer, said:

"How have obtained you the money to do all this?"

"Honestly. Money lent by my father to my uncle years ago, of which you have never heard, was this day repaid by my uncle, who has suddenly reappeared after years of absence abroad. Honestly, Simon Archer—can you say the same of all this wealth you falsely call your own?"

"Insolent! Go! You have dared challenge my enmity, young man. I shall vanquish you. I shall crush you—you and all your spurious claims. I know the ground I walk on—I will crush your heart where it is most tender."

"Enough," said Herbert, with a stern light in his dark eyes as he secured his papers. "I am eager to have you for an enemy. I understand what you mean when you say you will crush my heart where it is most tender. You refer to Evaline Reid."

"I do. To-morrow I make her my wife. Let that be nuts and wine to your dinner, Mr. Herbert!"

"So I have suspected, sir. But it is not for you to censure me in that wise, Simon Archer. I have here, in my bosom pocket—a loaded pistol over the packet—a packet of papers which place your life in my hands."

"Ah! you lie!"

"As I do not lie, I scorn the insult," replied Herbert, calmly.

"Papers? What papers?"

"Proof that Simon Archer, and not Tom Reid, was the murderer of Charles Acton. Twenty years ago the murder was done!"

Simon Archer could only stare and gasp.

"You had a clerk in your employ—a poor, debased drake of a fellow, Thomas Gray."

"Ah, old Tom Gray. It is then, from him?"

"Yes, from him—your despised tool. Not until yesterday, with all your harshness towards a poor fellow who once stole a few pounds from you, did you go so far as to beat him. Yesterday you beat him brutal with a can when he was drunk. When he became sober he swore speedy revenge."

"Poor soul!" said Archer, in scrofulous rage; "I'll have him in a cell within an hour, then what becomes of his boasting?"

"Last night he robbed that private safe behind you."

"Thunder!" roared Archer, all aghast, and springing to the safe. "Yes, it is true! Heaven! the Acton and Reid papers—he! gone!"

"No, I have them, and protect them with this," said Herbert, drawing a packet from his bosom with one hand and a pistol in the other.

Simon Archer sank down paralyzed at the door of his plundered safe, speechless with terror, dismay, and surprise.

"Gray sold these papers to me. They, and his evidence, shall prove to the world the truth—that you and an accomplice committed the murder—the murder of a man named Charles Acton—and fastened the crime upon Tom Reid, your bosom friend. At that time Tom Reid was young and rich, with but one vice. He was a hard drinker. You and your accomplice—and we can find that accomplice easily—found Tom Reid ne-

the scene of your crime, and placed upon his person such evidence as would have proved him guilty of your crime, if that crime were discovered. It was not discovered. You murderers hid the dead body of your victim in the earth—we know where you placed it—and afterwards made Tom Reid believe he had done a murder in his drunkenness. Then you bled his purse—reduced him rapidly to poverty and to abject terror for his life. There are papers, too, in this packet which reveal a secret that concerns Evaline. Simon Archer, you merit but one thing—the severest penalty of the law. I shall not be a weak-hearted accuser. I intend to avenge the dead and the living. Good night. A happy Christmas Eve to you, Simon Archer!"

With these terribly ironical words William Herbert turned sternly away and left the house.

"Lost! Ruined!" muttered Archer, when alone.

A pale and fearful face was his as he rose to his feet, and leaned against his plumed easel. Had the hangman's noose been round his neck, and he on the scaffold, he could not have appeared more ghastly.

His incoherent mutterings told his thoughts—told a secret, thus:

"All is lost! Evaline—how madly I yearn to make her my wife!—the lost daughter and heiress of Richard Towerland, the Scotch millionaire! Stolen by me in her infancy—to have revenge upon her parents. I loved her mother—never loved I a woman as I loved her mother—except Evaline, who is, to an eyelash, the glorious image of her beautiful mother. I stole her—I placed her in the care of this miserable Tom Reid—to have her reared as his by him—for me—that when she became the magnificent full-blossomed beauty she is I might wed her—then make the secret of her birth known to her parents—then be accepted as the son-in-law and heir of the wealthy, the princely Towerlands—then to do only good and no evil—beyond concealing the evil I have done. And now, all is lost! It drives me mad to lose Evaline—all other calamities I may dare. Rich, I may settle down this charge of murder. But to lose Evaline—to give her up to this fellow whom I have paid as a hired servant for years—my discharged cashier! Wait! all is not lost yet. Christmas Eve is but begun. Let me plot for Christmas Day. Ah, Herbert, Simon Archer has a Christmas gift yet in store for you."

He sat at a table and reflected. The sombre glare of his desperate eyes grew into triumphant and hopeful flame as he reflected.

It was an hour before midnight when a dark-browed, evil-eyed Spaniard entered the library and said:

"José de Leon, at your service, Mr. Archer!"

CHAPTER III.

SIMON ARCHER started with surprise. The Spaniard, De Leon, a tall and heavy man, with a dark face, dark-red from deep drinking, had glided in like an evil spirit. His touch upon the door had been as noiseless as a breath.

Peter, the janitor, had found him in a café, and had bidden him hasten to see Mr. Archer. Loth to leave his wine and boon companions, the Spaniard had been slow in leaving them, but had come before midnight.

He closed the door after him from cautious habit, and said:

"José de Leon, at your service, Mr. Archer."

"Ha, in good time, Captain José," said Archer, quickly. "We have no time to lose in beating about the bush. I have work for you."

"Good, señor—and gold?"

"You have been drinking—deeply," said Archer. "Deeply? Peste! a small matter of three bottles. My head and hand would be good had I finished five."

The Spaniard smiled grimly, his splendid white teeth gleaming under his jet-black moustache, and his magnificent eyes flashing from his dark-red face.

"It is well. Yes, I have gold—you love it."

"Ay, señor, for what it gets—the glory of sparkling wine, the joy of the gaming-table, and the smiles of beautiful women. Bravo for gold! I would do anything for gold. Remember Señor Carlos Acton—ha!"

"Death! Speak not his name now. His ghost is abroad."

"So! on Christmas Eve! Show me the ghost. José de Leon fears no dead men."

"Good. You know by sight my late cashier?"

"Herbert? certainly."

"He has got trace of the Acton business. Take care."

The Spaniard swelled his nostrils, and seemed to scent danger. A scowl grew heavy on his dark fore-

head. Where it had been red it became black with deep frowns.

"He has courage, De Leon."

"Bah—pesto! and I?"

"He will fight if insulted. He is no boy. Fix a quarrel upon him, and—end him. I will see you defended by the law. You are shrewd. Make the affair a matter of self-defence."

"Good. When?"

"Within an hour. He visits every night at Tom Reid's cottage. I am sure he is there to-night on Christmas Eve. He will leave, probably, at or just after midnight. Insult him on his way home. Say something stinging against the reputation of his lady-love, Miss Evaline Reid. He will strike you; were you a giant at the head of an army he would strike you for that. If you fail to meet him to-night, why, meet him in the morning. He must die, to save your neck and mine. See, Gray has robbed my safe. Herbert has a pocketful of papers—proofs that can hang us. He carries them in his breast-pocket—secure them."

"He dies before the sun shall rise on Christmas Day, señor, and the papers shall be ours to destroy. Friends take this keeping of dangerous papers! If I fail to slay him in the street, I will stab him in his bed. I know where he sleeps. I must go. Be easy—this is a small affair. Come, we will exchange Christmas gifts in the morning. You will count me out five thousand in gold; I will give you the stolen packet. I know the way out."

And, twirling his moustache, the truculent ruffian departed.

"Come, that Spaniard gives me courage. A bold fellow, and somehow he and I are devoted friends, and have never quarrelled."

He waited there in his library until his clock struck twelve. Time dragged as he waited, and he became more and more restless. At half-past twelve he sprang to his feet, saying:

"I cannot bear this. I must be doing something. Sleep! I cannot close my eyes to-night, when my very life is in the balance. I must be in the open air."

He went out hastily and by stealth. He left both hat and cloak behind him in his fever of anxiety. He was soon hovering near the cottage of Tom Reid.

The house was closed and dark, except at one window, where the soft light of a lamp gleamed through an azure curtain.

"It is Evaline's room," he muttered, drawing nearer and nearer to the low picket-fence which surrounded the modest little dwelling.

A shadow of some one passing between the lamp and the curtain flashed to and fro over the latter. Sometimes this shadow of an exquisitely shaped head, profile, bust, and shoulders would remain for an instant clearly drawn and stationary upon the faint sure of the almost transparent curtain. Then again it would vanish, to cross and recross, and be still again, like a fairy shape dancing and floating in a cloud of illuminated azure.

The outline was superb, ravishingly beautiful at times, and then all faded away. Whenever this shadow stood still it was divine in its perfect outline.

"It is Evaline," gasped Simon Archer. "Only her glorious form could cast such angelic shadow. And am I to lose her—the divine substance of this maddening shadow?"

He was insensible as a firebrand to the keen wintry air of the night. His blood danced in lava-like torrents through his veins. He gripped the fence with his hot palms. He riveted his gaze upon that azure curtain, that panorama of angelic shadows—shadows of a pure and lovely maiden disrobing for the night.

"A glimpse of the heaven I may lose," he muttered, tearing away a handful of his hair. "She said she would be my wife. She consented—heh! she consented. She is in my heart, in my brain, in my soul. I shall go mad if she becomes the wife of Herbert—curse Herbert!—or of any man—curse every man! I would there were but one man in the world—myself—and but one woman—Evaline. Cursed lamp! she has put it out. Cruel Evaline—is it with shadows I am to be rewarded?"

The cottage, dark and silent now, seemed to glare scorn unutterable at him, and he turned away, and put his cautious feet upon the course he judged Herbert had taken to return to his home.

He moved on for several minutes, over the hard, crispy snow, until he suddenly came upon the body of a man, face downwards in the snow, the body wrapped in a cloak.

Till then the moon had been hidden behind dark clouds. As Archer drew near this motionless form the moon shone out suddenly, like a huge globe of molten silver, radiant almost as the sun.

"A dead man!" said Archer, as he swept his hands

over the down-turned face of the body. "Oh Heavens, it is José de Leon! De Leon! dead! I can find no wound! there should be blood! not a drop anywhere on the snow. Dead! how? Ah, I remember, he used to have fits, spasms, convulsions—but surely he would have struggled—there has been no struggling here. What is this? a golden chain?—yes, and a packet, a something sewed up in a shark-skin. Good! I will take this to examine at my leisure—it may give me a clue to something of his life or origin. I must leave him. I have no time to charge myself with the trouble of such matters as an inquest and all that. Since he is dead I must try to play the part he spoke of—the dead to be done in Herbert's room. I must try to secure the papers."

He left the body and hurried on, never halting nor turning his head until he stopped before Herbert's house.

"I know where he sleeps," he muttered, as he gazed up at the brick edifice before him. "I know every crack and cranny in the house. He sleeps there in the room just over that trollis-work. I might climb that—but perhaps I can effect an entrance below and go up the stairs. Good! the front door is not locked. Ha! Christmas Eve is over a carefree time. They keep two servants only—doubtless, good cheer makes all sleep heavily. It is fortunate I tread as softly as a cat."

In the house, through the hall, up the stairs, along another hall—at last he stands within the bedroom of William Herbert.

He has made no noise. He touched the door and it was opened noiselessly.

Mrs. Herbert sleeps in a room on the other side of the hall.

Archer knows that well. He is familiar with all the habits of this house. For years he has visited it in the guise of a friend, of a benefactor, of a protector. Now he comes as an assassin.

He stands just within Herbert's room, near the door. His right hand glides into his bosom and unsheathes a broad-bladed dagger. He can see nothing. The curtains of the window are drawn, and the interior of the room is as dark, as silent as the tomb. His thoughts crowd thick and fast upon him.

"Doubtless Herbert has that accursed packet under his pillow. It is his habit to sleep with his valuables under his pillow—for he boasts that no man can touch his pillow and not wake him. It is not probable that he has left the papers with Tom Reid, though he may have spoken of them to the old coward. Ah, is that not his breathing I hear? or is it my own? How my heart beats!"

He sinks slowly upon his hands and knees. He fears the floor may crack or creak under the weight of his feet alone. He scatters his weight by lying flat upon the floor, as a serpent crawls—and how like a serpent he crawls—inch by inch, until his head touches the fringe of the bed covering.

He rises to his feet, cautiously. A shadow could not be less noiseless. He sweeps his left hand gently over the surface of the bed. The flutter of a bat's wing would be heavier than is the soft touch of his hand as his palm glides about to find the position of his intended victim—while the fingers of his right hand are like bands of steel upon the hilt of his knife.

The bed is vacant! His blood seems to turn to ice as he recognizes this fact.

And then, on the instant, his flesh creeps, his heart becomes like lead—heavy, cold as a cold hard-ended frost—for his ears thunder to his brain:

"Beware! Some one is in this room! A man has just entered, as you entered, to kill a man! To kill you!"

Nothing can be seen. The darkness is as impenetrable to the eye as a rock of black marble to a finger. But something can be heard, and the ears of Simon Archer are sharpened by his peril of detection.

He hears something creeping towards the bed. By the breathing he knows a man is near, is approaching.

A crash! What? The night wind has clashed a shutter against the window. A pane is shattered by the concussion, the wind streams in and flutters the curtains. The moonlight peeps in fitfully and starts as the curtain rises and falls.

For one instant only Simon Archer sees a pair of fierce eyes gleam, as a moonbeam, slender as a sword-blade, cuts across them.

"It is Herbert! He intends to kill me. The chance is all on his side."

He retreats; he crawls under the bed. The unseen man follows him even there; he emerges near the wall behind the bed; he bounds upon the bed and over it; a strong hand grasps his foot, and a keen, angry pain darts through his breast; he is slightly stabbed, but he starts back, and the hilt of his knife thumps against the lips of the wound the blade has made.



[SIMON ARCHER'S WOOING.]

A deep groan from the unseen man, and Archer flies from the room.

He is triumphant, for he knows that the man is dead. There is no hope for him; he is dead,

The deed was done, and Simon Archer fled, never thinking of the packet of papers until he sat pale and panting in his own bedroom.

"Ah, why did I forget the papers? But it does not matter. He is dead, and I shall hasten to claim them in the morning. He said he had not exposed me to his mother. She, therefore, still believes me to be her best and only friend. She will place everything in my hands. Oh, I forgot that uncle of whom Herbert spoke! But I think he said his uncle had gone away again—yes he did. Oh, I can readily secure the stolen packet in the morning! What a Christmas present I have left for Mrs. Herbert! And this parchment-covered packet of De Leon, what is in it?"

He cut open the packet. A golden locket containing a miniature in ivory fell out. Then a letter, old and faded.

He stared at the miniature. He grew paler than ever. He gasped:

"My mother's portrait!"

He flew to a desk, and taking from it another miniature, compared the two side by side.

They were exactly alike. They were undoubtedly painted by the same artist from the same face—a dark and beautiful Spanish face. His mother was Spanish.

He snatched up the old letter and opened it with shaking hands. His eyes glared wildly as he stared at the writing.

"My father's first letter to my mother! A copy of their marriage certificate in my father's own hand!"

He sat now, weak and faint, as a man who for the first time feels the waves of the sea heaving his heart to his throat. He was as sick as death, and the moisture that sprang to his hot face was as cold as frozen rain.

"Great Heaven!" he muttered, staring at the flame of his lamp, but seeing only the face of José de Leon in that jet of yellow fire. "De Leon was my brother! My dead parents used to tell me that when I and my twin brother—Hector, they said his name was—that when we were infants a year or so old the ship that was to bear us from Malta to England was wrecked on the Spanish coast—that Hector was lost—that he had with him a miniature portrait of my mother, and this first love-letter of my father, and this copy of their marriage certificate—and that on Hector's left breast, just under the

nipple, was a mole shaped like a cross. Ah, I remember all they told me! And now some strange sentiment of affection—stronger than mere liking of man for man—has ever been between us—me and De Leon. He himself has often spoken of it. Nay, we have even jested of the similarity of our profiles. And we were brothers! And he is dead! Dead out there in the snow, where I found him? I wish he had lived longer—long enough to know that I was his brother. But what now? Who comes?"

There was a violent rattling at his bedroom door, and as he started to his feet the door sprang open violently, burst in by a squad of policemen, and with them Tom Reid and William Herbert.

William Herbert, unharmed, and with an angry light blazing in his powerful eyes!

"Good Heaven!" cried Archer, recoiling and staring at seeing his late cashier. "Alive! unhurt! Then who was he?"

"The man you stabbed, the man you assassinated," replied Herbert, in a terrible voice, "was the accomplice of your crimes, José de Leon!"

Simon Archer uttered a shriek and fell on his knees, covering his face with his hands.

Herbert continued, in an unpitiful tone:

"Speak to him, Tom Reid. Let this miserable man hear the truth from your lips. Let him tremble at the sound of your voice as he has made you tremble for years at the sound of his."

Tom Reid—you could not have recognized him but for his white hair and his well-worn garb, he was so erect and grand in his attitude, and there was such a ring and clash in his words, like the sound of steel striking steel. Ah! a noble thing it is to see a man when he stands forth proud in his proved innocence of a crime that has shackled his manhood for years! Tom Reid, with eyes bright as stars and flashing as lightning, said:

"A merry Christmas to you, Simon Archer! You were watched and dogged from the moment you hurried from this house, uncloaked and bareheaded. You were seen as you glared at the shadows on Evaline's curtain. You were seen as you examined the body of a man fallen in the snow. He had been in a fit—he was subject to fits in which his body assumed the appearance and coldness of a corpse. De Leon was not dead. He soon arose, and hastened to do the deed you had bribed him to do. He entered Mrs. Herbert's house as you did, and not many minutes later. You soon after came out in a flight of terror. We then went in, and there we found José de Leon—dead."

"Take me to him!" screamed Archer, wildly.

"Do me this last favour! Let me see him ere you thrust me into prison."

"He is dead."

"Yes; but let me see his body. I implore this last favour—it is not much!"

Wondering, they complied. They led him to Mrs. Herbert's, into the grim presence of the dead man.

"Bare his bosom!" cried Archer, glaring at the corpse. "Over the heart—so—let me wipe this stain away. Oh, Heaven! it is no stain! He was born with the mark! My thrust went straight through it! My brother! He was my brother! I have slain my brother!" and, with a wild cry, the miserable man sank forward upon the body, moaning faintly: "My dagger's thrust was your Christmas gift—my dead brother Hector!"

When the officers of the law removed him, he continued to murmur those words alone, and Christmas Day dawned on him in his dungeon as still he muttered them in stony, tearless grief.

In a week he was a madman. But ere his brain was seized by the serpent-tipped fingers of life-long insanity his confessions had made all clear to those his boundless avarice had injured.

From that Christmas Eve Tom Reid became a new man. Years of suffering had for ever eradicated in his nature the thirst for strong drink that had, in his young and promising manhood, given him into the power of the merciless Simon Archer. His bent form became erect; his wrinkles fled one by one from a face ever joyous and smiling!

The Christmas gift Heaven gave Tom Reid on that eventful night was the most glorious and precious that you or I—that man, woman, and child can wear on heart and brow—recognized innocence.

May heaven, on each Christmas Eve of our lives, place this beauty in our faces, to be our joy and the joy of our firesides on every Christmas morn.

Evaline's long-bereaved father and mother, being soon informed of all that had passed, were in time to embrace their dearly beloved and long-lost daughter as a most precious and lasting Christmas gift, and as they learned the noble character of William Herbert they gladly consented to his immediate union with their beauteous and gentle Evaline.

One word more.

One year after the death of José de Leon it was Christmas Eve again, and Heaven sent to the happy home of William and Evaline this Christmas gift:

"A BOUNCING BABY-BOY!"

And so, my friends, a happy Christmas to all of you, and many returns of the same.

THE END



IN THE NEW HOME.]

THE CHRISTMAS CAKE.

HIS morning, as I was riding with my daughter Vivie through a poor neighbourhood in the lower part of the city on what—I need not be ashamed to own here—was an errand of charity, I pointed to the third storey windows of a dingy tenement house, saying :

"There, my dear, is the place where you were born."

Vivie did not sneer—I trust I have brought her up too well for that—but she shuddered under her ermine and Astracan, turned her bright young face away, and I knew by her expression that she tried to forget the unpleasant recollection in glowing anticipations of Mrs. Ashton's ball, which is to be this evening.

Ah, well! I could not blame her. For her this shambly old tenement held no tender memories or hallowed associations. Her outlook lies toward the future. But for myself, I fell into a dreamy reverie, living over again some of the happiest days of my youth, while I gazed back almost lovingly upon the rickety old house where the first home-nest of my married life was built.

We were both poor, my husband and I. Harry was a struggling clerk and I an underpaid teacher; but, oh! how thankful I often am for the sublime courage which made us dare to combine our freehold estates of poverty and love!

I have no patience with those who defer marriage until a fortune is made. True, they escape the toils and cares of poverty, but they also miss the high lessons of hope and faith that spring from them. The oft-quoted proverb, which I think must have been in Tennyson's mind when he wrote :

Oh, I see thee, old and formal, fitted to thy
petty part,
With a little hoard of maxims preaching down a
daughter's heart—

namely, "When poverty comes in at the door love flies out at the window," always reminds me of a passage of Holy Writ, which is, however, irrelevant to it. I mean, "The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling." Depend upon it, true, heaven-born love always nestles, cricket-like, upon the coldest hearthstone. The hireling which fleeth through the window is at best but a weakly sentimentalism, bearing no more resemblance to true love than does base alloy to fine gold.

Therefore, should young Edwards, my husband's clerk, ask for Vivie's hand to-morrow, and I was sure that this vital requisite was not lacking, I

would bestow my hearty blessing upon their union; for he has ability, he is thrifty, he will get on. Character is better than fortune.

But I was talking of my own early days. Sometimes I smile now when I remember the details of my humble menage. How proud I was of the simple rag carpet, made by my own hands, which covered the floor of the room which was to us parlour, dining-room, and kitchen in one! And how I used to admire my table, when set out with a snowy cloth and dishes of plain white delf! Sèvres and Majolica have given no keener enjoyment since.

Then my flowers! Yesterday, Roberts, our gardener, came to summon me to the conservatory to my Flor del Espiritu Santo, which had bloomed at last. And it was, indeed, a glorious sight, that pure white dove hovering within the crimson petals, but I don't think it gave me quite as much pleasure as the box of mignonette I raised on the window ledge of the old tenement house, or the row of fragrant geraniums on the sill within.

Of course we had plenty of neighbours in those times; and though we have since formed many pleasant acquaintanceships with persons of a higher rank, we still continue to count among our warmest friends some with whom we mingled in daily intercourse in our humble home.

Prominent among these are the Grobes, a German family, who lived just across the hall from us. I never met a truer lady than Madame Grobe. Shortly after we moved in, her children, seven, were taken with fever, and I assisted in nursing them, thereby winning her sincerest gratitude. I have always thought that she over-estimated my services, for it would have been strange indeed if I, a young, untrammelled woman, could not afford to lose a few nights' sleep to aid a suffering neighbour. It is not among the poor that such selfishness is found.

Years ago our kind friends moved, and their goodwill was not ephemeral as is evinced by an occasional letter glowing with warm wishes and tender memories, not to speak of the apples and nuts which come in to our children every autumn.

Then there was poor Fanny Lynne, who lived a storey higher, and who used to pant so as she came up the stairs. Poor thing! her unaided hand-to-hand struggle with poverty was so severe that all thoughts, save of labour, seemed to be crushed out of her being, till at last the kind All-Father, who understands and pities these toiling Marthas, gently drew the work from her weary hands, and folded them in everlasting rest.

Besides these there were Widow Ray and old Mr. and Mrs. Greenfield, an ancient couple, whose early days had been passed among the fresh pastures and budding orchards of a country homestead, with a

number of others. For the old house, which had once been a princely mansion, was large and sheltered many under its dilapidated roof.

In the back buildings was a colony of professional people, principally actors and musicians, whose noisy manners used to amuse me very much. But the person who interested me most was an old gentleman who lived far up in the attic. I said "gentleman," for though he might certainly have claimed the superlative of the word descriptive of us all—shabby—there was about him that nameless air of gentility which, like the perfume of roses, is never wholly lost. Who he was, and how he lived, were alike unknown, for he evaded all companionship, and, indeed, was seldom seen, save at nightfall, when he sometimes passed up and down with a covered basket in his hand.

Often in the twilight, taking Vivie in my arms, and going out on the landing to look for my husband, I watched this old creature flitting, shadow-like, through the gloaming till a strange, yearning pity for the lonely old man took possession of my heart. But nothing beyond a curt "Good evening" could my most cordial greeting ever elicit.

It was to chance at last that I owed my close acquaintance with him. One evening, when Harry was rather late in returning, and I had left the door open to light him up the stairs, my mysterious neighbour appeared upon the threshold, asking for a match, apologizing for the trouble by saying that he did not feel well enough to go out to buy any. I suppose it was the light that attracted him there, though it may have been my overtures of friendship; for I do not think a creature in the house, save myself, gave a thought to the unsociable attic lodger. He stood a moment looking into my humble room—humble, but bright as lamp and firelight, humming kettle, purring puss, and baby-laughter could make it; and if I ever saw hunger, bitter, heart-hunger, on a man's face, it was then.

"Will you not come in?" I said.

But my words, kindly as I meant them to be, only seemed to startle him to a sense of his occupation; and, thanking me, he turned and hurried away with the desperate haste of a lost spirit fleeing from the gate of that Paradise it may never enter.

"Unpromising subject," said Harry, at supper, when I was telling him about it.

But then he always had a habit of teasing me about my "unaccountable fancies." Subsequent events cured him of it.

Two days, three passed, without my seeing the old gentleman again, and I began to grow strangely uneasy. I remembered his having complained of illness, and imagination pictured his dying alone,

and unattended, in the dreary garret. By the fourth day my anxiety had become so intense that I resolved upon the bold course of going up to see him.

Wrapping baby in her little plaid shawl, I began my journey to the sky—that is, up the stairs. But ere I had ascended the last flight a strange noise greeted me, growing louder and louder as I approached the old man's room, whence it evidently issued.

It was that kind of sound which people speak of as making their blood run cold. I dare say the excited state of my nerves was unfavourable to calm judgment, for to me it seemed that it could proceed from nothing human. Sharper and sharper it came.

I stood irresolute, not knowing whether to advance or to beat a retreat, and, summoning up the courage of desperation, I ventured closer and knocked boldly upon the door.

The rasping and scraping, or whatever it was, ceased instantly, and a voice within demanded:

"Who is there?"

"Mrs. Lawrence," I answered; then, thinking that he might not know my name, I added, "the lady on the second floor, from whom you borrowed some matches the other evening."

"Very well. I'll be there directly."

Then followed several minutes, wherein I could distinctly hear him crossing and recrossing the floor, lifting heavy articles and setting them down again; and when at last he opened the door he was so evidently surprised, not to say disengaged, at the interruption that I grew painfully confused.

That he wished to hide his annoyance was, however, apparent from his greeting.

"You must excuse me, Mrs. Lawrence," he said, "for keeping you waiting so long. You were so kind as to invite me into your room the other evening; and I cannot do less than return the compliment, though my place is not very inviting."

There was an overstrained effort at politeness in his manner that was far from placing me at my ease.

"Thank you," I stammered. "I did not intend to come in. I only came up to inquire if you were ill, having missed seeing you for several days."

"You are very kind, I'm sure," he replied, absently, as though but slowly comprehending the fact that any one could take so much trouble on his account. "But I have not been ill—that is, but slightly—only very busy."

But even as he spoke, as though in contradiction of his words, he grew giddy, and was forced to grasp the door-frame for support.

Setting baby down on the floor, I assisted him to cross the room to the bed, where he sank down exhausted.

It was, as he had said, a poor room, containing nothing but a few articles of absolute necessity, no attempt at ornament, or even moderate comfort, being visible. Directly in front of the single window stood a table, over which was thrown a checkered cover, evidently with a view to concealing something underneath. I felt morally certain that it had been placed there during the time that I was waiting at the door, and as I glanced at the curious shapes by which it was pushed up and bulged out in places I shuddered, being equally well convinced that the terrible noise I had heard had proceeded thence.

I had, however, but a moment for inspection, for the old man, reviving, made light of his attack, said that he was subject to such turns, would be quite well presently, and begged that I should trouble myself no farther.

Seeing that my presence only irritated him, I withdrew. But when an hour later I ventured up with a cup of tea he was still lying upon the bed, and even my imperfect knowledge of sickness taught me that he was in the grasp of fever. That was the commencement of a protracted illness.

Vainly I besought him to let me send for a doctor. He would not consent, nor was it necessary after the first few days, for the disease assumed that form which is so often brought on by overwork and excitement, and for which there are no better remedies than rest and care.

But how was he to have the latter? That was the question! When I asked him if he had any friends to whom I could send the bitter despair of his reply pained me beyond description.

"Not a soul upon earth who cares whether I live or die!" he said.

And, throwing his worn old hands above his head, he looked at me with an expression of hopeless misery that I have never seen equalled.

Well, there was nothing else to be done. I must undertake it myself. The most I could do was but little; but I could not know of a fellow creature being in such distress under the same roof with me without trying to mitigate his sufferings.

I used to go up several times a day with little comforts, and while there perform some of the many offices necessary in a sick-room; and though he always remonstrated against my attentions, and de-

preciated his need of them, I knew that my services would be missed if discontinued, and learned to wish for no sweeter reward than the glad smile which lighted the weary face on my entrance.

"Bess," said my husband, one evening, as I knelt before the grate, browning a piece of toast for my patient, "I don't half like your conduct towards that old man, and I wish you'd stop."

"Surely, Harry!" I exclaimed, letting the fork drop in astonishment, "surely, you don't begrudge that poor old creature a slice of bread now and then?"

"No!" thundered Harry, indignantly; "but what I do begrudge is having you danon attendance upon him as you do; for aught we know, he may be a counterfeit, or worse. By your own admission, there is something very mysterious about him; and next thing you'll find yourself in a scrape that may be hard to get out of—"

"Oh, Harry!" I interrupted, "it is long since I have thought of him otherwise than as a poor and lonely but harmless old man. Come up with me and see him for yourself. I'm sure you will be of my opinion."

Harry grumbled a little about having a wife who would make him drag up three pair of stairs; but he was naturally kind-hearted, and by the time that I had my toast buttered and a cup of tea poured out he was ready to accompany me upon my errand.

My customary tap was answered by a cheerful "Come in!" and we were advancing into the room, when, catching sight of Harry, the old man sprang up in the bed with unlooked-for energy, and, throwing out his hands, as though to ward off danger, exclaimed:

"Go back! Go away!" then, turning to me, "Make him go! Oh! in pity, make him go!"

"Hospitable old party, I must say!" muttered Harry, while I hurried forward to soothe the sick man.

"It's only my husband," I said. "He came up to see you."

"Oh, send him away! Send him away!" he continued to cry, the flush of excitement growing deeper upon his withered face; and, seeing that there was no use in trying to remonstrate, I urged Harry to go down.

"It's the fever, you know," I whispered. "I ought to have prepared him for your coming," and gently closing the door after him I returned to the bedside to try, by cheerful sympathy, to undo the evil which I feared would result from my thoughtlessness.

Going down stairs a few minutes later, I found baby still asleep and Harry pacing the floor in no enviable mood.

He came forward as I entered and placed his hands upon my shoulders.

"Now, Bessie," he said, gravely, "this thing has gone far enough. No honest man would have acted in that way—and I am now fully convinced of what I was only suspicious before; therefore, let this be the end of it. Understand me, Bessie, don't you go up there again."

I did go a few times, nevertheless. I don't hold up my disobedience as a precedent for others, but how could I forsake my old protégé without a word—especially when he apologized with tears in his eyes for his rudeness to my husband? But I did not transgress very often, for my patient, who was already mending, grew better fast; things resumed their former routine, and before autumn we had trouble of our own.

The great mercantile house, where Harry held the position of book-keeper was broken up by the death of the head of the firm, and my husband was thereby thrown out of employment. At first this did not seem such a very heavy misfortune, for with his good reputation and fine business abilities, Harry did not anticipate much difficulty in obtaining another situation. But how fruitless were his best endeavours, and how our hearts grew gradually sicker and sicker under the blighting shadow of hope deferred.

It pains me even yet when I think of the evenings when he used to come home, foot-sore and worn with fatigue, from his useless journeys in search of work.

Unused as he was to much bodily exertion, this protracted exercise told upon his health; and though, on his return, he was never so tired to have a romp with Vivian, and merry words with prophecies of better luck on the morrow for me, I knew that this cheerfulness was only assumed for my sake—that grim despair was beginning to tug at his heart strings.

It was a weary autumn to us. I had been brought up in the country, and as imagination pictured the abundance there at that season—the ripened corn-fields, where the great, yellow pumpkins lay like huge balls of gold, the mellow ornards, and the woods teeming with nuts—it seemed incredible that any of Heaven's creatures should want. But, alas! it was fast becoming so with us.

Meanwhile the old attic lodger pursued the even tenor of his way—kind and polite when I chanced to meet him, but quiet and unobtrusive as ever. Of late I fancied that there had come to be a strange buoyancy in his step, and a light in his eye, such as we see in one who nears a longed-for goal; but I considered that it might be only in contrast to my own despondency.

Occasionally he had slipped a quaintly carved toy into Vivian's little hand when she happened to be out in the hall, but he seldom came to our room. It was, therefore, with some surprise that, hearing a knock one day, I opened the door and found him standing there, holding a miniature wind-mill with gaily painted sails in his hand.

"It's for baby," he said, deprecatingly, glancing at my face.

I tried to thank him, but my voice failed, for my heart was heavy within me. Things had been gradually growing worse with us, and only that morning Harry and I had decided that our humble rooms must soon be exchanged for yet plainer lodgings. It was not that I minded the change so much, for I know that it was not the surroundings, but the hearts within, that made a home of any place; but it was as the first step downwards that I dreaded it.

I think the old man understood my condition at once, for he came in, and, gently closing the door behind him, walked over to the window. He stood a moment picking nervously at some withered leaves on my geraniums, as one uncertain how to express himself; then he spoke abruptly.

"Mrs. Lawrence, don't you imagine that if the Good Samaritan ever got into trouble he who fell among thieves was the first to offer him aid and sympathy? Well, as I stand in much the same relation to you, will you not tell me the cause of your distress, and let me, at least, try to mitigate it?"

This was the longest speech I had ever heard the old man make. He spoke awkwardly, hesitatingly, but there was no mistaking the genuine pity expressed in his words. I had been choking back the tears for weeks, but at this kind touch they burst forth like an imprisoned flood; and amidst my sobs I poured out a history of our troubles to one whom I instinctively felt was not only an interested listener but a friend in adversity.

For awhile he allowed me to indulge my grief unchecked. Then, leaving the geraniums and taking a seat near me, he told me something that dried my eyes and brought the long-banished smile back to my face. But, as it was to be a secret for awhile, even from my husband, I will let the reader wait a little for an explanation.

The early weeks of December sped by without bringing any improvement in our affairs. I had begged that we should not move until after Christmas; and though the weekly rent was a heavy strain on Harry's slender savings, the morning preceding that great festival found us still in our old quarters.

"Harry," said I, as, breakfast over, he began to prepare for another weary march, "I wish you'd leave me some money, I want to bake a Christmas-cake."

Harry opened his eyes wide in astonishment that I, who had been so rigidly economical, should wish to rush into such extravagance; but he evidently had not the heart to refuse me.

"There, Bess, that's the lot!" he said, smiling sadly, as he placed two pounds and some small change upon the table.

Poor fellow! I could scarcely refrain from throwing my arms around his neck and revealing that which I most desired to keep a secret. However, I conquered my weakness, and said, calmly:

"Well, I'll take one pound. I can make that do."

Harry looked at me a moment with an expression in which consideration for me and thoughtful prudence were strangely mingled; then, with some hesitation, he said:

"Do you think it is wise, Bess, to do this just now? The rent will be due in a few days too."

"I don't care!" I interrupted, recklessly. "Christmas comes but once a year, and I am determined to have the cake."

My husband said no more; and as soon after his departure as I could get my breakfast things cleared away, and the necessary materials procured, I began operations.

Little Vivian, perched up in her dinner chair at the table, was vastly interested in seeing the sugar and eggs beaten into snow like foam, and screamed with delight.

In a spoonful of this I mixed a pinch of cochineal, and the legend that I traced in rose-coloured letters on the pure white crust was the old, old Christmas anthem "Peace on earth, good will to men."

That evening, after baby had gone to sleep, and I had slipped a home-made dolly into her little

pockst, I went across to help the Grobes dress their Christmas tree.

Those who imagine that happy Christmas comes in its fullest enjoyment only to the rich are vastly mistaken. The loving cheerfulness with which they hung thereon their humble offerings of simple toys and rosy apples was only equalled by the boisterous joy of the young recipients in the morning.

Returning in half an hour from this scene of contented gaiety, my home looked dark by contrast. The fire had gone down, and my husband sat brooding sadly before the cheerless grate.

"Come, Hal," said I, slipping up behind him, catching his head and shaking it, "come, wake up, and drive away the blues! It's Christmas time; I want you to cut the cake. See, here it is," I continued, as, with considerable pride, I brought forth the crowning proof of my culinary skill.

I had no holly to wreath it with, but my unfailing geraniums furnished a fragrant and scarcely less beautiful substitute, and I was glad to see Harry rouse from his melancholy to smile at my effort at decoration.

He cut two golden wedges, and was just going to lay down the knife when I stopped him.

"Cut another, Harry," I said. "There's a dear."

He glanced at me a little suspiciously.

"For baby. Maybe she won't waken to-night again. Besides, it ain't good for her."

"Not for baby," I answered, with a little quiver in my voice that I could not subdue; "for the poor old man up in the garret. Oh, Harry! we are poor, but we have each other. Think what it must be to be all alone, with no one to remind him of the holy season; no voice to wish him a 'Happy Christmas!'" and as I spoke I pointed to the inscription within the wreath, "Peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Harry did not need much persuasion. His is not a nature to bear malice; besides, the sharp winds of adversity which had blown around us lately had, in a great measure, dispelled the clouds of prejudice and suspicion through which he formerly viewed our unsocial neighbour.

Leaving Vivie sleeping sweetly, we ascended the stairs, knocked, and were cordially welcomed by the old gentleman. It was quite a contrast to the last time we had gone there together. We had evidently been expected, and Harry, noticing this, looked at me for an explanation; but I strove to appear perfectly innocent and unconscious, though, in my confusion, I almost forgot to offer the plate of cake I held in my hand—the ostensible object of our visit.

After the usual compliments of the season had been exchanged, and when the conversation began to grow genial and unconstrained, our host asked if he might relate a portion of his history, and, we acquiescing, he began:

"I cannot remember the period when I was not a dreamer, nor, on the other hand, can I recollect a time when there was not method in my madness. From my earliest boyhood I have been possessed of a mania for invention—that insatiable craving which leads so many, I had almost said innocently, to sin. It was this uncontrollable propensity that made me a careless scholar, a burden and mortification to my friends, and finally drove me forth, a self-exiled wanderer on the earth. And yet, looking back now, I think I can truly say that my wildest dreams were never unmingled with the hope of improving my kind, of aiding struggling humanity.

"I will not weary you by speaking of the early and unsettled portion of my career. It contained the usual chaotic mass of boyish schemes, and is as well forgotten. For the last fifteen years I have had one definite object before me, which I have steadily pursued amid such buoyant hopes and crushing defeats, anxious longings and grinding poverty, as those who have followed a similar ignis fatuus may know.

"At last," and here the old man's eyes flashed with the true fire of genius, "at last success has come; but, like all earthly success, it comes too late—too late, at least, to admit of my carrying it forward unaided, as I once hoped to do. My desire, therefore, is to obtain a young and active partner; and knowing, Mr. Lawrence, that you are at present unemployed, I have ventured to hope that I might find such in you. I may add, frankly, that it is less any knowledge I have gained of your character and ability than my grateful friendship for your wife which prompts the proposal; and now, if you have no objection, will you look at my model?"

Slowly, almost reverently, as one approaches a shrine, he lifted the old checkered cover, and there, in all its curious combination of polished wood and burnished metal, stood the finished dream of fifteen years.

It certainly seemed a wonderful piece of mechanism, as we examined it there by candlelight. As the immortal Mr. Weller would have said, there

were "veils within veils;" and, altogether, it was far beyond my comprehension.

But Harry caught the idea at once, and, what was of more importance, recognized the availability; and, long after I had gone downstairs to baby, he sat discussing ways and means with his attic neighbour.

There was another surprise for us all, which came out a day or two later; when the talk about the invention having given place to more desultory conversation, some of our kind old friend's remarks concerning his youth led Harry to recognize him as his runaway uncle of whom his mother had often spoken. As her marriage took place after her brother's departure, our name had never suggested any relationship to the old man; and his astonishment at finding that he had been unwittingly aiding his nearest kin was as great as ours in learning that for our renewed comfort and prosperity we were not indebted to a stranger.

As may be supposed, it made us all very happy to know that to the ties of business and sympathy was added that of consanguinity, making a three-fold bond of union.

We did move after Christmas; but it was to a comfortable house, which, when success and fortune became more assured, we exchanged for our present home.

It is, I suppose, almost unnecessary to say that our kind benefactor, or Uncle Charley, as we now call him, accompanied us, or that it became one of the deepest studies of our lives to repay in some measure the debt of gratitude we owed him by striving to obliterate, through home-joy and fireside joy, all remembrance of those long years of exile and loneliness.

And we succeeded; for though, as he realized, his day of active exertion was past, it was followed by the peaceful calm of old age, that tender twilights of the silver-haired, illumined by the morning-star of memory and Aurora-gleams of a coming glory.

Now, too, the absorbing, consuming passion of his life seemed to be quenched, or displayed itself only in the invention of toys for the children, especially after Charley, his namesake, arrived and had reached an age when he could appreciate perfection in kites and almost perpetual motion in humming-birds.

As he grew older and more feeble he seemed to grow also daily more and more gentle. And, paradoxical as it may appear, though his heart over beat true to the purest evangelical faith, he always cherished an idea of a glorified humanity, which, though not redeemed, was at least to be reclaimed and elevated by the genius of invention and the progress of science.

This seeming contradiction became clear at last. He had been gradually failing, but his faculties were as bright, and his interest in public advances as keen as ever, when the end came.

Years have passed away, but the name of Uncle Charley is not forgotten in our home. Often, as Harry and I look around upon our children, growing up amid all the advantages of culture and refinement, we feel our hearts glowing with loving remembrance of him whom, besides a kind friend and tender relative, we must always regard as the founder of our fortune.

A. M. D.

AUNT OLIVE'S DIAMONDS.

CHAPTER I.

LAWRENCE and I were just sixteen—twins. But we were not in the least alike. I was plump and blonde and sunny; he was dark, melancholy and imaginative. We loved each other all the more dearly for the difference, I think.

I was astonished and bewildered. There he stood at the open window, his face very pale.

"Are you ill, Lawrence?" I said, impulsively.

"No."

He stepped back from the window and made a warning gesture of silence.

"Hush! I saw a man's face under the bushes."

I felt my cheeks grow pale, yet it was Lawrence's face that frightened me, it was so white and wild-eyed and stern.

The lilac bushes were about six feet from the window. I looked from my brother's eyes to the waving white plumes and saw the danger. The two long south windows were swung out. If any one was there they could hear and had heard all that was said in the room. And Lawrence and I had just been talking about poor papa's gold chest.

We were all alone in the house, but until that moment I never had had a thought of fear. Mother and Vattie and Osmond Wade had gone to Brierly shopping, and they had taken Tom, the driver. Through the illness of our cook we had been left with only one servant, and Betty was off for a holiday.

As I stood looking at Lawrence it flashed upon me that Betty might not come home all night. She was honest and reliable, but a thousand things might happen to detain her in the village. Mother's party we knew would not come; they were to spend the night at Aunt Eleanor's.

The house was in the loneliest of situations, placed in a hollow nearly half a mile from any other. It was surrounded on two sides by an ornamental garden, on the third was the road, while on the fourth rose a wooded ascent, crowned with fir.

The longer I stood looking at Lawrence, with his white face and warning finger, the more frightened I felt. I was shaking like an aspen when he called me into the sitting-room and closed the door.

"Oh, Larry, are you sure?" I whispered, grasping his arm.

"Perfectly. Where are father's pistols?"

I stared at him as he commenced the search. Somebody says "He is a truly brave man who fronts the foe with a pale face." Lawrence's cheek was white, but he was perfectly self-possessed. I was trembling and shrinking, he was cool and alert.

"The pistols are in the escritoire," I faltered, at last. "What are you going to do with them?"

"Load them," he answered, quietly.

I stood watching the process and wishing vain wishes. I kept so close to him that when he turned quickly he nearly tumbled over me.

"Go upstairs, Rose, and lock yourself in your chamber. If I have to fire, they will hear the report at the knoll and come down."

"Oh, Lawrence!"

"Well?"

"You are not going to face the danger?"

"There may be none"—I knew he thought differently—"but I am going to see what that fellow wants. Get out of the way, like a good girl."

I had not the least intention of obeying. I certainly should have resisted any attempt to force me away from my protector, but a sudden panic seized me.

A low, sharp whistle sounded—the strangest sound I had ever heard. With a cry I fled from the room, flew upstairs, and locked myself in my chamber.

I had no sooner done so than I was tempted to rush back to Lawrence's side. I grasped the door-knob, then stopped.

I shall never forget what I suffered as I stood there, hesitating and listening. All was so still! not a sound anywhere but the stir of the flowing curtains at the three long windows as they swelled in the wind!

Oh, what was Lawrence doing? Not a murmur or a footstep. Could I not run for help? Mr. Elton's great house was just above the ridge of fir upon the knoll. If I only dared go down!

Every moment I expected to hear the report of a pistol, but it did not come. Moment after moment went by. Surely something had happened or Lawrence would come to me. I was trembling and crying when I heard a sound.

It was a footstep ascending the stairs. A fresh terror smote my heart, but it was Lawrence.

"Let me in, Rosie."

In a moment I was embracing him rapturously.

"Oh, Lawrence, what have you been doing? What is that?"

He had a glove in his hand—a dirty buckskin glove.

"This is all I found of him. He had gone."

"Where?"

"I don't know—from under the lilacs."

I breathed more freely.

"Are you really sure that there was anybody there, Lawrence?"

"As certain as that I see you at this moment. I had just gone to the window for the knife—which lay on the sill—when my eye fell directly on a thin, dark face with glittering black eyes among the low boughs of the lilacs. I had the presence of mind to drop my eyes and commence mending the pencil. Just then you asked me to get you some lilacs. I knew that the person who was hidden there was listening to every word we said; I was pretty well stirred up for a moment."

"Oh, Lawrence, you are so brave! so splendid! I shall be so proud to tell mamma and Vattie. I don't believe that even Osmond Wade could have done better!"

We descended again to the sitting-room. As we passed through the halls a little apprehension that the enemy might have got into the house seized me; but I found that Lawrence had the doors and windows all locked.

There had been gypsies in the neighbourhood. We concluded this man to be one of them as we sat waiting anxiously for Betty's return. At last we saw her coming across the lawn, and she certainly met with a warm welcome.

I begged her to sleep in my dressing-room that

night. When she saw the glove she consented. Though I had bad dreams, the night passed safely.

At nine o'clock we began to look for the carriage. Mamma never travelled in the heat of the day; she would start early, and be home early.

I had lessons on hand, but I am afraid they were not very well attended to that morning. Lawrence, with his susceptible temperament, looked a little pale and languid after yesterday's excitement. Being somewhat wiser than I, perhaps he had not slept as well. There were five hundred pounds in money in the house. In times past there had often been more.

Papa had occasion to travel with large sums—often brought large sums with him. They were always deposited in a small chest of oak and iron which had stood in his chamber. At various times large sums of gold was deposited there. From children we had called it papa's "gold chest."

We had been speaking of it, and of Betty's difficulty in moving it, as she swept the room, just before Lawrence discovered the man in the lilacs.

Lawrence was picking out a somewhat obsolete air on the piano, while I yawned in the rocking-chair, when the polished panels of the carriage flashed in the sun just at the turn in the road. We sprang to the door.

On they came, the horses stepping proudly and looking as if they had coats of black satin. Tom's horses always looked as if they came out of a bandbox. Betty was wont to say—a statement which Tom was satisfied to consider complimentary, though Lawrence and I laughed at it. There sat mamma, looking tired, with her lap full of bundles, but smiling at us. There was Vattie, and Osmond Wade chatting delightfully, I was sure, and fanning himself with his straw hat. He had a great bunch of roses which I knew were for me, from Aunt Eleanor's garden, from whence they had named me when I was a fresh and remarkably pretty baby.

Yes, Osmond was talking—he was always chatting and laughing—when one of the horses took fright at my handkerchief which I had waved—swung and dashed the carriage against a tree. It pitched frightfully; I saw mother fall, and screamed in terror.

Lawrence ran out. Osmond and Tom lifted her. I flung my arms around Vattie.

"Oh, what shall we do? what shall we do?"

"Don't, Rose; try to be calm. We'll lay her on the couch in the sitting-room. And bring hartshorn, and cold water, and towels."

Now this was not in the least like Vattie, but people seldom do what you would expect them in an emergency. Vattie was as sensitive as Lawrence, and as excitable as I—yet she went to work as collectedly as if she had neither heart nor nerves. Tom went for the doctor. Osmond discovered that her arm was broken, and had everything ready for the physician when he arrived. He set the bone, administered medicine, and left his patient doing as well as could be expected at two o'clock in the afternoon.

Then commenced a long stage of nursing. We took our share in turns. Mamma was not very strong, and the shock had been a severe one. Her arm refused to heal readily, but this did not seem to be the worst effect of the accident. The nervous system had received a severe shock; it was a somewhat unusual and very difficult case, the doctors said. The most trying feature, for us, was the frequency of long swoons in which she would lie insensible for hours. They were so like death that at every repetition I experienced afresh the calamity of orphanhood. It was like getting her back from heaven when she opened her eyes.

In a week we were all depressed, worn, and haggard. I should have been stronger if I could have helped crying, long and bitterly, every day of my life. The dread and the danger weighed so upon my untried heart.

Vattie was head nurse. Lawrence, for three nights, when her situation seemed almost precarious, slept on a pallet at mother's door. Osmond took his turn in watching; he, too, was under the spell. He was not only concerned for Vattie's sake (ever since he had been poor papa's ward he had been in love with Vattie) but he was fond of mamma, and suffered from the universal apprehension. He soothed our fears, watched day and night by the sick-bed, provisioned the house, and took charge of all outside commissions in every direction.

Vattie was ill with sick headache, and Lawrence and I were in mamma's room, when the bell rung. I started apprehensively, but mamma did not seem to mind the noise, and I went silently out to meet Betty in the hall.

"Who is it?"

"A nurse," answered Betty.

"Oh, I am so glad!"

A singular figure rose as I entered the sitting-room. It was a woman dressed in red. Her dress

and shawl, and even her silk bonnet, were of the same deep crimson. She was very comely, and there was something striking and magnetic about her as she received my extended hand, and commenced speaking:

"I heard that you needed a nurse. I am accustomed to the care of the sick, and have come to offer my services."

"We do need a nurse very much. Where are you from?"

"I am out of the village."

"What is your name, may I ask?"

"Helene—Helene Asque."

"I shall be very glad if you will."

Then I tried to tell her something of mamma's condition. She observed me, meanwhile, very attentively. She had very powerful black eyes, with jetty brows and lashes, and though I hardly realized it I was not quite easy under them, though if I thought anything about my feelings it was to regret that I had not more aplomb in dealing with strangers. I thought she must see that I was very girlish and inexperienced. I recollect that I was rather glad when the interview was over.

I ran upstairs to tell Lawrence that assistance had arrived at last.

"She is an odd-looking woman, dressed all in red—such singular taste, Lawrence!" I whispered.

"There is something foreign in her appearance, but she seems bright and quick, and ready to understand. Won't Vattie be glad?"

He nodded, and went over to the bed to wet mother's lips.

It was nearly dark when Vattie, who had discovered the new nurse, came in with her. I noticed that Lawrence stared at her.

"Isn't there something odd about her?" I whispered.

He made no reply, but still watched her as she stood silently receiving Vattie's directions about the medicines. Now that she had removed her bonnet, she showed crisp-curling black hair. Her collar was fastened with a silver pin in the shape of a dove with spread wings and rubies for the eyes. Her movements were quick and abrupt, yet made in silence.

She seemed very strong. I watched her lift and turn mamma, who looked at her with her languid, half-unconscious eyes, and was quite prepossessed in favour of her efficiency. She arranged the glasses on the table, smoothed the coverlid, placed the lamp with the most skilful effects of shadow, and aired the room without making a draught. Then she sat down in an easy-chair at the foot of the bed, looking capable of remaining perfectly wide awake all night. I heard Vattie draw a long breath of relief.

"What made you stare at her so?" I asked Lawrence, when we were out of the room.

"I have seen her before somewhere," he answered.

"Don't you think she is handsome?"

"I don't know. There is something disagreeable about her to me."

"I shall be sure to dream of her."

I was tired enough to sleep without dreaming, but I had a very strange vision. In the dead of the night I thought I heard breathing by my bedside. A terrible weight of sleep was upon me, I fainted, and I struggled to throw it off and rise and discover what it meant; but I sank into unconsciousness again. But at last I thought I did leave my bed and go to the door, where I heard steps. I thought the hall was full of moonlight, and as I looked out I saw Helene Asque's red dress glide out of sight at mother's door. I have thought since that it might not have been a dream, but I awoke late in the morning with the feeling of having slept too soundly. The whole had seemed but a few moments of profound slumber.

Mamma was looking brighter that morning. As I hung over her, kissing her, and tucking her soft grey hair inside her cap, her glance wandered to where the new nurse sat.

"Who is she?" she asked, feebly.

I told her all we knew.

"Don't let her go away. No one lifts me as easily as she does," she said.

"Not even Osmond?"

She shook her head.

I saw that the nurse was listening.

"You'll stay, won't you?" I asked, eagerly.

She nodded.

Lawrence laughed at my swelled lids at breakfast. We were all in better tone.

"Bother me, Rosie, if I didn't dream of that woman in red, last night," said he.

"Did you? What?"

"I thought I heard her in my room rummaging about my things. I woke up and found that puss had got shut in, and had made a sleeping nest of my desk full of papers."

"Why, I shut the cat in the cellar myself!"

"Well, she got out, somehow. There she was,

settled snugly among my Latin themes and compositions."

"I thought I heard someone go downstairs in the night," said Osmond.

It was nothing very mysterious that the cat should get access to the chambers, after all. I recall it as part of the drama played that summer.

Mamma had begun to improve. We obtained a good cook, the weather was cool, and we thought ourselves prospering finely when the cloud revealed itself.

As I was running through the hall, one day, I met Helene bearing a tray for mamma's room.

"Miss Rose," said she.

I stopped, holding some dew-wet vines at arm's length from my cambric wrapper.

"I want to know if you think your girls are honest?"

"Why, I suppose they are. We have never had any reason to suppose otherwise," I stammered.

"I have missed things from my room. I have lost money in small sums. Now my pin is gone."

"The silver dove?"

She nodded decisively.

"I am very sorry. I cannot understand what it means," I answered, feeling greatly shocked. "I'll speak to Vattie about it."

She passed me in silence, and went upstairs.

It was annoying. Vattie and I talked it over. We could not suspect Betty; we did not like to accuse our cook. She was rather pronounced in her expressions and manners. We could imagine a storm of honest indignation from her that would be somewhat intimidating, to say the least.

So nothing was done, but to urge Helene to look her door, and to beg her not to leave us until mamma had more fully recovered.

"If I stay any longer than this week," said she, "I shall be obliged to send for my luggage."

"That you can do," said Vattie, "and Tom will go down to the station with the spring waggon and bring it up. Then you can lock things in your trunks," she added, "and not have them exposed to risks."

As I have said, there was always something singular about Helene. I remember that she laughed a little at that, and, serviceable as she was to us, I never did like her laugh. I thought her more odd than ever as she looked closely at both of us, and then went upstairs.

Well, her trunks came the next day, and with them a parrot in a cage.

The bird was very handsome, of a brilliant green and scarlet. I admired him greatly.

"He is a pet of mine," said Helene. "I have no one to leave him with, and I was afraid he would be neglected."

She put her finger through the bars of the cage as she spoke. The bird made a feint of nibbling it, but when I put up my finger he bit me so sharply that the blood came.

"I cannot teach him to be civil to strangers," said Helene.

"Devil!" called the bird, hoarsely.

Vattie and I stared.

"He learned to swear from the sailors on board ship," said Helene. "Chut, Ceto—whistle for the ladies."

The parrot put his head on one side and whistled the *Marseillaise* most beautifully.

"Now say your prayers."

Word for word the creature repeated the Lord's prayer.

It was rather shocking under the circumstances.

"He used to belong to a missionary," said Helene, with her peculiar laugh. "He will spend hours pitching a hymn, singing a strain and then beginning again. Say good-bye to the ladies, Ceto."

"Good-bye! farewell! adieu!" called the bird, solemnly, as his mistress took him up to her chamber.

When Lawrence came in and heard of this acquisition to the family he was eager to see it. He went upstairs, and Helene brought the cage to the door of her room and made Ceto talk and pray, mew like a cat and whistle like a Java sparrow. But he bit Lawrence so sharply that he was glad to keep at a distance.

Aunt Olive Preston arrived that evening.

Aunt Olive had always been my admiration. I cannot say that the partiality was reciprocated. Vattie was her favourite—Vattie, whose lustrous dark eyes and blue-black hair were repetitions of her own famous charms. She was still handsome. Her skin was as white as paper, her glance piercing, and her throat and shoulders beautiful, though she was past fifty. It was to Vattie that the diamonds were to be given. I had been promised a necklace of sapphires—which were resplendent—but I never fancied that I was Aunt Olive's favourite.

She came with her carriage, her coachman, and her maid Lucie—a gentle little blonde French girl, not in the least like French maids in general.

We were a little flustered. It was not Aunt

Olive's way to mind making people trouble. She considered a certain style of living quite indispensable. No more luxuriating in wrappers all day; we must dress for the afternoon. We must drive and visit and, as soon as mamma was quite well, make parties. Aunt Olive had come to stay for the summer.

"Your mother must come down to-morrow, Vattie, my love," said Aunt Olive. "Nothing so bad for a convalescent as confinement to one room. By the way, who was that queer woman in red who just passed the door?"

"Mamma's nurse, Helene. She is a very excellent person."

"And she has the queerest old parrot, Aunt Olive!" said Lawrence.

"Does she know how to make gruel? Few people do. I have taught Lucil. That girl is valuable; I shall remember her in my will. I don't like that woman's eyes. They look bold."

"Oh, she isn't bold. She is as steady as a clock and devoted to her duties. She seldom speaks unless spoken to, and she never seems fatigued. She takes mamma in her arms and lays her on the sofa while her bed is being made as easy as I could lift a baby," said I.

"Don't like her looks!" persisted Aunt Olive, shaking her head.

That evening, after Aunt Olive had gone to her room, I stopped Lucil in the hall.

"Lucil, has your mistress gone to bed?"

"No, miss, not yet."

"I wonder if Vattie and I might go up a little while."

"Yes, miss, I presume," answered pretty Lucil, with her sweet little smile.

The next moment Vattie and I invaded Aunt Olive's dressing-room:

"What do you want, my dears?"

"To see your jewels," coaxed Vattie.

"Well, bring me the box; it's on the table there. You are still fond of diamonds, then, Vattie?"

"I have a passion for them!" said my sister.

Aunt Olive, in her gray flannel dressing-gown, sat by the blaze on the hearth, for the night had set in rainy and quite wild, and Vattie and I, all eagerness, knelt down on the hearthrug at her feet. The box had a key of silver, was of rosewood, and divided into compartments lined with garnet velvet. Aunt Olive laid back the lid and the contents actually blazed in our faces.

"This is the parure," said she, lifting the linked brilliants and letting them sway over her hand, a line of gold and fire. "It's a long time since you have seen it, Vattie."

Vattie actually trembled with eagerness.

"Oh, how beautiful! how perfectly beautiful!" she exclaimed. "Oh, nothing is so handsome as diamonds!"

Aunt Olive drew out the sapphires. I received them quite as eagerly as Vattie had welcomed her diamonds. I wound them through my fingers, which they curved about like a blue flame, scintillating sparks of light.

"So brilliant! and yet they have a pure look, like dewdrops," said I.

There was another chain of rubies, and a little Geneva watch, set with brilliants and emeralds, pearl bracelets, and rare mosaics and cameos.

"I bought a pair of bracelets for each of you, but they are not unpacked yet," said Aunt Olive. "You shall have them in the morning. They are very pretty, but I think you have seen vanities enough for to-night. Run away to bed now."

"I shall have diamond dreams!" laughed Vattie, springing up.

"You shall have diamonds themselves, some day, my dear, if you are a good girl," replied our aunt, graciously.

CHAPTER II.

VATTIE and I were both in high spirits after our treat and sprang buoyantly into the hall. I ran against some one there who seemed to have been near the door, I could not tell whether it was a man or woman.

The hall lights were extinguished, the illumination which streamed from the wax candles of Aunt Olive's dressing-room was very faint.

"Who is it?" I called, but there was no reply, only soft, swift, retreating footsteps.

"Why, who could it have been, Vattie?" said I.

"Who did it seem to be?" she whispered, groping for the stair-rail in the dark.

"It seemed sturdy enough for a man, but I thought I heard a woman's dress sweep the floor. How mean to listen at aunt's door! It must have been one of the girls."

"Was it Lucil?"

"Lucil wouldn't have been listening. If she had been coming in she wouldn't have run away."

We found our way to our rooms. I had lighted

the tapers in the sconces beside my mirror, and was brushing out my hair when Vattie tapped at my door and entered.

"Rosie, I feel really uneasy about Aunt Olive's jewels. You know Helene has lost things, and there are so many entrances to Aunt Olive's rooms that I am afraid she may not lock them all, and something might happen to her valuables. Those diamonds are so costly and guarded so carelessly."

"I don't know any safe place for them but papa's gold chest. No one could break that open."

"I believe I'll go and tell aunt."

"Very well," I said, yawning.

But Vattie didn't go—after all, she didn't go, but went back to her room and went to bed.

The first thing in the morning I always went in to see mamma. We had planned to have her come down that day, according to Aunt Olive's urging, but she had taken a little cold, and did not feel quite equal to it. So I prepared her breakfast with my own hands, and took it up to her.

She was sitting by the fire. Helene had dressed her in a rose-coloured wrapper which gave her quite a colour, and with the bed in nice order, the table spread with flowers, breakfast trays and books, instead of phials and glasses, the appearance of the sick-room was quite altered, and decidedly improved.

After breakfast, Osmond was going to take Aunt Olive and Vattie a drive in the carriage. It was a fresh, sparkling morning after the rain, a little fresh, and after the horses were brought I noticed Osmond taking out the afghans.

"Tell them to wear pretty comfortable wraps," he said to me. "It's a cool morning."

I went and delivered my message at Aunt Olive's and then at Vattie's door. I don't know what connection there was between mackintoshes and jewel-boxes, but, directly after, Aunt Olive made her discovery. She came down into the hall where we were all standing, white as a sheet, and said:

"I have been robbed!"

We stared and stammered.

"My jewels are gone!"

"The diamonds?" cried Vattie.

"Every article in the box."

We rushed up to examine the empty casket—better able to believe our eyes than our ears.

"We'll search the house!" cried Osmond.

"I don't believe they are in the house," said Vattie. "See here."

There was a window partly unclosed. It opened upon the balcony. The hasp to the shutter was broken and useless.

It was probable that the window had been open all night behind the closed shutter, and the thief's entrance was clear.

Aunt Olive looked as if she had been ill a month. We were all pallid and nearly speechless.

"Auntie, it was careless!" Vattie could not help murmuring.

"I know it," was the defenceless answer.

"We'll have the house searched," repeated Osmond.

We repaired to the kitchen. Jenny and Betty were baking cakes and chatting and laughing cheerily.

As my eyes fell upon them I could not harbour a suspicion against either.

As Osmond made his announcement of the theft their behaviour was characteristic.

Betty sat in a chair, stirring a pan of sweets. Her twinkling Irish eyes seemed set in her head. She grasped the sides of the pan with her plump hands, and ejaculated, breathlessly:

"Hear that now!"

Then, for awhile, she seemed incapable of any more words.

Jenny received the news with an entire difference of demeanour. She paused over her pastry, to listen with profound attention, every instant growing more erect and defiant.

"Well, then," she exclaimed, when Osmond had finished, "and what do you come to tell me for?"

The idea of Aunt Olive's jewels having any temptation for Jenny was simply out of the question. But Osmond found it necessary to make some reply:

"Probably not, but as the jewels went out of the box last night, all under the roof must submit to having their effects examined before their innocence can be established."

Jenny dashed down the rolling-pin.

"Come, then," cried she, striding before us.

We followed her up the back stairs to her room. She flung open the lid of her trunk, she stripped the bedstead to the very mattress, she threw back the doors of the wardrobe, pitching her dresses into the room, and would have ripped open the ticks of the beds, but Vattie stayed her hand.

"No, no, Jenny, that will do," she said, soothingly; "we have taken all the observations necessary here. Now the others must take their turn."

We went to Betty's room, to Helene's, to the

stable loft where Tom shared his comfortable quarters with Aunt Olive's coachman. It seemed very useless labour, for in our hearts we could not find a suspicion where it would stay. When we called Helene out she listened quietly, and with the utmost composure consented to have her trunks examined.

When we did so we found in one of them some articles of masculine apparel which she informed us had belonged to a young brother who was lost at sea.

While we were at our work, the parrot called us "devils!" but seemed to repent of his impoliteness, and begged us to "take a chair." We knew Tom to be honest; he had served papa in the most confidential relations for years. Aunt Olive declared that she could vouch for her coachman; yet everybody was pretty well overhauled. Still there was no clue to the robber.

We went into council. The house was in a lonely place, and surrounded by excellent hiding-places for thieves. The probability, and almost certainty, was, that some one apart from the family had committed the theft. We were deciding upon placing the matter in the hands of the police, without delay, when Lawrence touched my shoulder.

"Come with me, Rose."

I followed him out of the room. As he went upstairs, he pulled a buckskin glove out of his pocket.

"Why, Lawrence! did you save that old glove?" I exclaimed.

"Hush!" he whispered. We were passing mamma's door. He pulled me into his chamber and locked the door.

"Don't speak so loud. This isn't that glove, but the mate to it."

"And where did you find it?"

"In Helene's trunk."

We looked at each other in silence. Finally, Lawrence opened a drawer and took out the other glove which he had picked off the grass near where the man had hidden under the lilacs.

"That man is the thief!" I exclaimed. "He has probably prowled around here until he has obtained his booty. By this time he is safely off with it."

"If a burglar has been in the house, we had better look to other things. Let us examine papa's gold chest," said Lawrence, rummaging in his writing-desk for the key—a little ornate brass affair, which he had for some time had possession of—Lawrence being noted for the unusual care he took of treasures, and being trusted by mamma with various things of value. He searched in vain.

"Why, where can it be? I always keep it in this drawer with my seal and gold medal. It is gone, as sure as the world."

Farther search availed nothing. We went into the little room adjoining mamma's chamber, which had served papa as a study—entering by door from the hall—and examined the oak chest. We found it in its place—locked.

We went down to the parlour and reported these new developments then. More consternation. But a smouldering fire began to glow in Aunt Olive's black eyes.

"My suspicions are fixed upon that woman, Helene," said she. "That mated glove has no small significance. I firmly believe that she is, at least, accessory to this robbery."

"Oh, Aunt Olive," I exclaimed, "you don't know how good she has been to mother!"

"What does that signify, you little goose? If this is—as I imagine—a deep-laid plot, this nursing business is a part of it. I believe that she came here with the deliberate purpose of robbing you."

We were none of us willing to believe that, we said, in the first breath. But Lawrence was silent.

"But we'll question her about the glove," said Osmond.

"What good will that do? You are only children, all of you! Do you imagine she is going to tell the truth like a model Sunday school scholar? Let me manage. First, let me look at the room of this Helene."

Vattie and I went up with her. We were very quiet. The search was pushed into places I should never have thought of—behind picture-frames and mirrors, in vases filled with flowers, into the interior of plaster statuettes, beneath the carpet in spots not likely to be trodden on.

"The money in papa's chest is gold. I hope that has not gone," I said, disconsolately.

The parrot stood on his perch watching us with his head on one side.

"Don't come here," he croaked, savagely. "Noboby wants to, I am sure," said I. "You are too cross."

He drew his tawdry head between his shoulders and laughed:

"Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho! He! he! he!"

"Hasn't he a handsome cage?" said I.

But Aunt Olive looking meditatively about the

room, made no reply to such an irrelevant question.

"Two thousand pounds!" screamed the parrot, and then gravely imitated the clink of gold.

Aunt Olive started at that, and looked at Vattie.

"Who takes care of this bird?" she said, going over to the cage.

Ceto bristled up angrily, imitating the clink of gold.

"Don't touch him!" we cried. "He is ill-natured, and bites everybody but his mistress."

Aunt Olive quietly lifted the cage from its nails.

"How heavy it is!" she said, with sparkling eyes.

We looked at her in astonishment.

"Have you not one of those buckskin gloves in your hand, my dear?"

Putting it on, to protect her hand from the furious onset of the enraged bird, she placed the cage upon a chair, and commenced examining it.

"What in the world are you doing, Aunt Olive?"

"My deare, do you not see that the bottom of the cage contains a compartment? Ah, here is the spring. Now, girls!"

A slide had glided aside, showing a circular cavity of about six inches in depth, and twenty in diameter. We saw, instantly, that it was not empty. Aunt Olive first drew forth a package of golden coin—then a case of cameos—then the sapphire necklace—then more rolls of gold—finally the diamonds! Every missing article of the jewel-box, besides other valuable articles which we had not missed, were there; among them a silver salt-cellar and a pair of gold salt-spoons which must have come from the dining-room. Here was a bracelet of mine, and a little gold coin of Vattie's—articles of adornment which we had forgotten in the time of sickness and trouble. The money had papa's mark upon the wrappers, and had been taken from his gold-chest.

Aunt Olive's voice trembled in spite of herself:

"Rose, you call Osmond and Lawrence."

"Yes!" exclaimed Vattie, "and call Jenny and Tom, and all of them! To think that we should have had a suspicion against them!"

I sped away trembling and with an instinctive caution. As I went downstairs I saw Helene leave mamma's room, and go towards her own. Osmond and Lawrence came eager by at my call. I followed them back to the scene of discovery, giving Betty the good word on the way.

A tableau presented itself as we entered the room. There stood Aunt Olive and Helene, the treasure on the table between them—the former glowing with indignation, the latter scowling defiance. She stood with her arms folded across her breast, and as we entered the room, emitted one of her discordant laughs.

She denied her guilt with a bewildering audacity, and only showed discomposure when Osmond approached her. She stepped away from him towards an open window which was behind her.

Osmond despatched Lawrence for the police, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket. The next moment Helene cleared the window with a bound.

Such a screaming! My feeling was that she had dashed herself to death, but Osmond, with an expletive which I never heard him use before, rushed from the room in full pursuit. And, indeed, she was not hurt, but running at full speed across the lawn.

Aunt Olive had presence of mind to secure the valuables. We were hardly downstairs before Tom, and Aunt Olive's coachman, and Osmond—for it took all three—came bringing her back. She struggled, she raved, she swore, she used various expletives, which filled us with wonder, until Tom rested from the exploit of blinding the criminal in the hall.

While the men were panting, the prisoner swearing, and the parrot screaming so that the whole house rang, the police arrived. One of them, Loxley, had a remarkably sharp eye for rogues. The moment it fell upon the supposed Helene he exclaimed:

"Ah, Hombert! at your old tricks again?"

"Do you mean that this person is a man, Mr. Loxley?" asked Aunt Olive.

"He's pretty well disguised, that's a fact! I tell you, madam! He's only three-and-twenty, but he has been committed twice. He's done pretty heavy thing this time, I take it?"

"He has been employed here as nurse, and has stolen every valuable thing he could lay his hands upon."

"You found him a good nurse, now, I dare-say."

"Yes, indeed!" I said, trembling, and feeling more agitated than any other member of the family, perhaps, since I had been instrumental in the fellow's introduction among us.

"He can cook like an old woman, and gamble like

a Frenchman. He's an old stick. Well, Hombert, you'll get sent up in earnest this time."

A derisive laugh was his answer.

Loxley and his aids took away their prisoner. As he went out of the door, he looked over his shoulder, and called:

"Miss Rose, take care of Ceto; you can tame him with sugar. He'll be fond of you soon. Good-bye."

He seemed to go away quite cheerfully when he found that it was inevitable.

We never told mamma what the confusion meant, or gave the true reason for her nurse's sudden departure until she was entirely recovered.

Ceto was starved into submission to my civil advances, and eventually became quite reconciled to me—would repeat my name, and obey my voice, but I never could like him, and he was finally adopted by Tom, and introduced among his stable pets. Ceto's master was committed to prison for seven years. No after news of him ever reached us.

E. S. K.

CLARA'S MASQUERADE.

"My dear Marion, I believed you are the only disinterested friend I have in the world: but if you knew how tired I am of what you call my immunities, you would not try to persuade me from my purpose—if you knew how long I long to be treated, once in my life, as simple Clara Vining, without a penny to my name."

The petted heiress tossed a diamond bracelet among the glittering treasures of her jewel-box as she spoke, and looked at her friend appealingly.

They were totally unlike, these two who were so inseparable. Marion Barclay was dark-eyed, and stately as an Egyptian queen; Clara Vining was blonde and blue-eyed, like a daughter of the sun.

"It's such a very old whim, dear," murmured Marion. "I am sure everybody loves you. What have you done with Lucien Verner? He was disinterested."

"They're all alike, I believe. Read that Marion," Clara said, taking a letter from her sacriste. "I suppose he happened to be writing to someone else at the same time, and the other letter got into my envelope. But it was a lucky mistake for me. I never want to see him again."

Miss Barclay busily examined the billet. Her friend designated the offending passage, in which the writer alluded to "the beautiful Clara" as being very far from adamant, and characterised her golden charms as exceeding all others in his eyes.

"You poor dear Clara!" commented Miss Barclay. "But men are not all so selfish as that."

"I am satisfied that they are," retorted the heiress, with mingled petulance and wisdom; "at any rate I am resolved on this experiment. It will be refreshing to be nobody for once in my life, at any rate. You will keep my secret, won't you?" she said, coquettishly.

"Oh, certainly. But what will people think? You are certain to be found out, Clara. Anyone who had ever seen you before would know you at once, no matter what you wore."

"I don't know about that. I don't look like the same girl with my hair taken out of curl, and dressed plain. I've been looking over the advertisements this morning, and there's a family near Chilton that want a chambermaid. Of course I couldn't undertake to cook or be laundress, or anything of that sort. But anybody can make beds, and I'm sure these are people I don't know. What I want of you, dear, is to write me a character."

Marion did as she was bidden, but she looked disapprovingly still.

"How will you account for your absence?" she asked.

"People can be given to understand I am visiting some friends at a distance. That is easy enough."

"What if this Miss Wilbur," glancing at the advertisement Clara brought her, "should not want you? She may have already hired someone."

"I shall try somewhere else in that case," said Clara, with decision.

So provoking! fretted Marion Barclay to her half-brother, Walter Sloan. "I've manoeuvred so long to bring you two together, and now to think that she should get this absurd whim in her head!"

"I say, Marion," exclaimed the young gentleman addressed, "if Miss Vining is chambermaid, why can't I be coachman?"

"But perhaps Miss Wilbur don't keep a carriage."

"I'll trust that to my luck, which has been bad so

long it's time for a change. If she hasn't any use for coachman, I'll offer to serve her in some other capacity. I'm not going to be cheated out of my chance of the heiress without a struggle."

"It's fortunate that she don't know you. I declare, Walter, if you play your part well, I don't see what's to hinder your winning the day. Clara is the most romantic girl you ever saw. You must cultivate coquettishness at the expense of romance and good looks."

Walter Sloan, the spendthrift and adventurer, thought his luck had certainly turned when he found that Miss Wilbur kept a carriage, and that the driver thereof was willing, for a consideration, to shun sick a few days, and recommend him in his place.

He had few acquaintances in the city, and calculated on having no difficulty in evading these.

Miss Wilbur was an old maid, according to the most angular understanding of the word. She did not look as though she had ever been anything else. She early discovered that her new chambermaid was not an adept in her business. Bridget Malone, as the girl called herself, could neither make a bed nor sweep a room properly, and Clara received the full benefit of being "nobody" once in her life; for Miss Wilbur, while she would keep her, because of her indifference about wages, lectured her unceasingly for her ignorance of the duties she pretended to be able to perform. In fact, Miss Wilbur's tongue was so sharp sometimes as to bring the tears to Clara's eyes.

Miss Wilbur's own maid, who was a very nice, ladylike sort of a person, but somewhat shrewish like her mistress, did duty in a like manner whenever that lady was not on guard.

Meanwhile Clara, in spite of her unskillfulness, played so artfully as to deceive even Walter Sloan, who took the lady's maid for the heiress, and paid her such assiduous courtship as bade fair to melt that fair creature's scruples about marrying a coachman.

"I hope," said Miss Wilbur, sharply, one morning, "you'll manage to keep my nephew's apartment in decent order while he stays. I shall be very much displeased if you do not; Mr. Verner is so particular."

She did not observe the start Bridget gave, and she had.

"I don't care," declared Bridget, as soon as she was alone; "I'll stay all the same, if it is Lucien Verner. If he recognises me I'll pretend I've lost my money."

She was watching from the upper landing when he came, and it was Lucien Verner.

She took to dowdying herself after that as much as possible, and went about her duties with an old hood pulled over her face. She did not really know whether she wanted to be recognised or not.

Somebody else had recognised Verner also. Walter Sloan muttered an oath when he found who Miss Wilbur's nephew was.

"If he recognises my heiress, and she finds he didn't write that letter after all, it might make a difference."

He had made good progress, however, with the lady's maid, Miss King, as she was called, and for fear Verner, who was an old acquaintance, should recognize him, he summoned the real coachman back to his place, after having expedited his business with Miss King by asking and receiving her consent to become his wife.

Marion Barclay was in raptures at the report of his success. But both were anxious while the heiress and Lucien Verner remained under the same roof.

Lucien Verner, meanwhile, without really having any suspicions, regarded Miss Bridget with manifest uneasiness and curiosity. Every movement, every transient glimpse of this girl, whose face he had seen but once, and only for a moment then, reminded him of one to whom all the devotion of his manhood had gone forth beyond recall.

The consummation of this little game at cross purposes came in this fashion:

Bridget had not been in attendance in the dining-room since the arrival of Mr. Verner, owing to the fact that Miss Wilbur was afraid to trust her there.

On Christmas day, an hour before dinner, the girl who usually waited was taken ill, and Bridget was summoned to fill her place. With inward consternation and outward equanimity, she prepared to do so, and was standing demurely at her post when Miss Wilbur and her nephew entered.

Lucien Verner hesitated one puzzled instant, then he advanced, pale with surprise and joy, and extended his hand.

"Miss Vining!"

"I am so glad you have tired of that foolish masquerading business, dear," said Marion Barclay to her friend Miss Vining one morning, as Clara,

restored to her own aristocratic belongings, rocked softly to and fro in a velvet-cushioned easy-chair. "I have a brother come since your eclipse, Clara. May I bring him this evening?"

"I—am engaged this evening to go out with Mr. Verner," murmured Clara Vining, timidly. "In fact, I may as well tell you Lucien explained about that letter that angered me so, and—we are to be married, Marion, love."

Marion Barclay barely contained her consternation till she got home, and told Walter Sloan.

"Have you a picture of Miss Vining?" demanded Walter, upon whom a hint of the truth began to dawn, as his sister told her story.

Marion brought him one. He glanced at it, and grew pale and then red.

"That is not the girl I've been making love to," he said, angrily. "I thought all the time the other was the prettiest, but she was so very Hibernian I didn't imagine she could be the heiress."

"Is it possible you were such a simpleton?" exclaimed Marion.

"I'm glad I'm not married to the other one," declared Sloan, ruefully.

C. C.

SECRET LOVE.

"LADY EVELINE, I have a proposal for your hand in marriage from the baronet. Sir William Hamilton, who has just left my presence, I have given my sanction to his wooing, and he will be here again this evening to proffer his suit to you in person," said Lord Francis Roseleigh to his daughter, as the latter entered the apartment in which her sire sat, and whither she had been summoned by a messenger from him.

"The baronet, Sir William Hamilton, wishes me for a bride?" faltered out the Lady Eveline, in dismay, and with paling features.

"Yes. Is it so very strange that Sir William has taken a fancy to my daughter, who has beauty if not sufficient wealth to grace any station?" inquired Lord Francis, with a smile, as he gazed upon her fair face. "You are both nobly born and titled, Lady Eveline, though your sire does not possess such vast estates as the more favored son of fortune, Sir William Hamilton," added her father.

This last remark of Lord Francis Roseleigh was very true, for though he was possessor of a title, yet the estate which had descended to him from his ancestors was meagre and poor. But then the nobleman had always kept up his good name, and made a fair appearance amid the more wealthy nobility with whom he associated. He was a skilful and successful manager, and his household expenditure all came under his own eye, and were conducted with economy and tact, so that the Lady Eveline, though she knew they were not as wealthy as some of their friends, yet never realized how rigid was the economy which supplied her with the delicacies which she saw about her every day.

Her father loved her, and gloried in her exceeding beauty. She had been his hope for years. If she made a brilliant match, then his ends would all be answered; and so he kept the burden of their straits to himself, and lived on from day to day, hoping that all his fond dreams would at last be realized. This morning a most brilliant proposal for her hand had been made, and now Lord Roseleigh grew light-hearted over the bright prospect which opened for his child. But the Lady Eveline now looked up into her sire's face. She had recovered her colour, and a sunny smile was on her features as she made reply:

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of the baronet's fancy, my dear father, only so far as it concerned our ages. But you know that Sir William is at least twenty years older than I, and I don't think it a suitable match at all. Why, he is fully as old as you, my father, and how strangely we should look together."

And the lady burst forth into a merry peal of laughter at the thought.

But Lord Roseleigh did not join in the merriment. Instead, his countenance darkened, and he spoke in tones so unlike his usual kind ones, that they sounded odd and harsh to his daughter's ears.

"Listen to me, Lady Eveline, and put aside this trifling manner, for it appears to me very unseemly, as I see no impropriety in this match. Sir William, though older than you in years, yet has a youthful heart and countenance. He is immensely wealthy, and most ladies would consider this fact a sufficient inducement to become his wife. But you seem to overlook this entirely. As his bride, you would dwell in London like a queen, and be the envied of your sex. However, all that aside, it is both suitable and to be desired. I have already given my word to the baronet that it shall take place at an

early day, so you perceive, my daughter, there is nothing left for you but to become busy with your wedding trousseau after you have held interview with Sir William, and give him a favourable answer to-night."

As her sire was speaking, the smile died from the features of his daughter, and her face grew very pale and white. She realized that her parent was deeply in earnest and had set his mind upon this match with the baronet. Hitherto she had ever looked upon his word as law. He had always been kind and indulgent to her, but she knew that he could be firm and unmoved when he determined upon any particular course of action. But this marriage was against all the principles of her nature. She felt in her soul that she could not wed the baronet, though he were rich as Crescuss himself. Ah, she could never do this, for did not her heart hold a secret which would prevent this step, if there were no other reasons against it? And so the Lady Eveline ventured once more to offer remonstrance.

Going up to her sire, she flung herself down before him, and with earnest voice entreated him to revoke this hasty decision.

"I cannot indeed, I cannot wed Sir William Hamilton! Tell him so when he comes again, my dear father. Let me stay with you, and do not condemn me to wed this old man, whom I can never, never love!" she pleaded.

But Lord Roseleigh was inflexible. He could not alter his decision. She would get over this girlish sentiment, and become happy ere she had been united to the baronet a twelvemonth, he replied, in cold, unmoved tones, and his daughter rose up from before him, and went out from the room, feeling for the first time in her life that her father was hard, stern, and cruel.

But it cost Lord Roseleigh an effort to be thus inflexible. The Lady Eveline was his worshipped idol, and to thwart her in anything was a great cross to him. To doom her bright eyes to the tears which he perceived were upon the lids as she left the apartment, gave a pang of sharp pain to his own heart. But it was for the best, he reasoned. So, after he was alone, the nobleman rose and paced the room in a disturbed, uneasy mood, saying, as he strode to and fro:

"I can see no other prospect so advantageous for my child. This marriage must, then, proceed. If the Lady Eveline will escape the poverty which must necessarily come after my decease, if she remains single till then. Let it go forward, she may learn to thank me for it in the end."

That evening Sir William Hamilton came to press his suit with the Lady Eveline. But it was not till Lord Roseleigh sent for his daughter that she made her appearance in the drawing-room. Then she came in, looking pale and somewhat sad. But her father regarded her with a glance of sternness, as he went forward to meet her, and whispered in low tones in her ear:

"Bring only a bright and cheerful face here, Lady Eveline. I command it both out of respect to ourselves and in honour to our guest."

Then he led her forward, and presented her to her future spouse, uttering a few words of parental congratulations to the two. After that Lord Roseleigh went from the room, leaving the two together alone.

The Lady Eveline made resolute and desperate efforts to appear calm and like her usual self, and if she did not succeed, the baronet supposed her evident nervousness but the result of the new situation in which she found herself placed toward himself. He was a man of wealth, rank, and great kindness of heart, and this wooing was almost the first love-making of his life. He now respected the lady's shyness of manner, and omitted pressing a lover-like suit. Instead, he related in a few sentences his interview of the morning with her sire, and Lord Roseleigh's acceptance of his suit, and now he had come to her this evening to learn her mind, and settle the date of their wedding-day, "and," he added, in conclusion, while a tender smile dawned upon his noble features, "let the marriage-day be soon, dear Lady Eveline, for it will be the happiest of my life which gives you to my love and tender care."

The Lady Eveline listened with cold, hard feelings in her breast. At the concluding sentence, she could scarce refrain from shrieking out her distaste, her utter abhorrence to the match. But she must go like a lamb to the sacrifice, and utter no complaint. So she stilled her heart's wild throbbing, and said:

"I leave all the arrangements to you and my father, Sir William. Pray excuse my farther presence this evening, as I am not well, and shall feel best in my chamber."

And she rose as she spoke, and bidding Sir William

seek her sire in the library, she somewhat abruptly left the drawing-room.

Some two hours later, the Lady Eveline, with a light summer mantle wrapped about her, left her chamber, and stole out to the garden adjoining the house. She glided through the clustering shrubbery, and paused not till she stood at the end of one of the serpentine walks, at some distance from the house. The moonlight shone upon her, and showed an anxious, expectant face, which was pale, and had yet the traces of the recent tears upon the dewy lids.

She paused amid the clustering vines which overran some shrubbery at the termination of the walks she had chosen. As she did so, the figure of a young and fine-looking man sprang out of the thicket, and in a moment the Lady Eveline was clasped in the stranger's arms.

"Ah, it is you, Lady Eveline! And you have come at last, after my weary watch of a full half hour!" exclaimed the man, in fond, yet half-reproachful tones.

"Waiting, have you been, Philip? yet you are hidden away so closely when I come that I am compelled to gaze all about ere you make your appearance, and then you come dashing from the thicket, and affright me out of my breath," she replied, smiling.

"Oh, yes, I hid away in yonder shrubbery, because I heard a footstep, and thought it might not be you dearest Lady Eveline; and now I humbly crave your pardon for giving you a moment's uneasiness or fright," he exclaimed, in many tones, adding fondly, as he gazed at her with an expression of deepest affection. "you know that our secret would be endangered were I discovered here at this time of night."

"Yes, I know it, and might have thought you had good reasons for secreting yourself, Philip. But then I am excited and nervous to-night, and it is no small wonder if I have any reason left," she ejaculated, in sad tones.

"What is it that annoys you, dearest Lady Eveline? Tell it me, that I may drive it hence at once," said the young man, in eager tones, as he tenderly stroked the brown locks, and pressed the slender hand more firmly in his own.

"Listen, Philip, and then say if we have not cause to be disturbed and unhappy. The baronet, Sir William Hamilton, has been with us to-day, and seeks my hand in marriage. My father has bidden me receive him as my future husband, and he came this eve to press me to name an early day for the wedding," she said.

"And you, Lady Eveline—you? What did you make answer to this love-smitten old baronet?" he questioned, excitedly.

"I told my father this morning that I could not wed the baronet; and when I knelt imploringly to him he sternly bade me rise and do as he commanded. His word had been passed. I was to wed the baronet. To-night, when Sir William came, my lips were frozen, though my heart was silently bleeding within my bosom. I could not speak, and sat like a marble statue and listened to my noble lover's words. Then, when I could bear it no longer, I pleaded indisposition and went up to my room, where I have been brooding over my misery ever since. Philip, till the stroke of the clock reminded me that it was long past the time of your appointed meeting here."

"Oh, Lady Eveline, this is too terrible! More dreadful than death itself to me the thought of losing you! But it must not, shall not be! I will seek your father, and entreat him to cancel this promise—to give you to me; though I am poor, as yet, and without name or fame, still my pictures are now being sought after, my name is beginning to be spoken of by the public. I can, at least, give you a comfortable home, though not a luxurious living, dearest Lady Eveline," he said, in sudden resolve.

"It would avail naught, Philip, and but call down the displeasure of my father upon your head. You must not take this step for it would be utterly futile and useless," she exclaimed, in answer. Then she continued: "I see no way left but for me to obey my father's wishes; unless—unless," she said, thoughtfully, "I appealed to the honour and humanity of the baronet, who is, it is said, of a noble heart, and often does most magnanimous deeds."

"Ah! that would never do!" returned Philip, sadly. "A man of the baronet's position and wealth has but to stretch forth his hand and desire anything, and it always falls within his grasp; and our two hearts must be rendered wretched and miserable for life!"

And the lover spoke despondingly. At this moment a slight rustling of the hedge by which they were standing attracted the attention of the unhappy pair, and both turned in some alarm, expecting to behold an intruder upon their interview, but nothing met their gaze.

"It is but the wind, or a bird fluttering uneasily on its nest," said the young man. "The wind is rising, and you are but thinly clad, dearest. It is best that you return to the house at once. I will be here again to-morrow eve. Come to me, Lady Eveline. Let the final parting not be to-night."

And he pressed her passionately to his heart as he spoke.

Then the two parted. Lady Eveline returned to the house, while her lover left the garden, and neither beheld the tall, dark figure of a man steal from behind the hedgerow near, and glide through the serpentine walks.

Time passed, and a month glided by, and the baronet came often to the Lady Eveline's home. Yet he spent the greater portion of his time, while there, in the library with Lord Roseleigh. He did not prove a very pressing or ardent lover, and Lady Eveline felt emotions of gratefulness for his non-attendance upon herself. Nearly every night she stole forth and met Philip Arnold in the garden, and listened to his lover words. But, though she met him, and was often pressed by him to flee from her father's house, to go with him and become his wife, and thus escape the hated marriage with the baronet, yet she had never brought her mind to take this first step. And so she often returned to her home, wretched, pale, and miserable.

Lord Roseleigh noted how his daughter's face grew pale, and that her manner was sad and drooping, and he affected not to see it; and so each day went, and the time drew near for her approaching nuptials.

One morning Sir William Hamilton paid the nobleman an early visit. Lord Roseleigh was in his library, and his visitor was shown thither. But the baronet, though he suspected, did not know that Lord Roseleigh was busy with his weekly accounts. He had keen eyes, and had used them to advantage during his visits at his lordship's house, and he had perceived that Lord Roseleigh was more earnest for the match than his daughter, and also surmised the cause in his own great wealth, knowing, as he did, that the nobleman was not overburdened with worldly possessions himself. Now, Lord Roseleigh rose from the secretary, where he had been balancing his expenditure for the past month, and also reckoning the amount necessary for the full trousseau of his daughter, and greeted his early visitor with a smiling welcome.

"I am intruding on your business hour, I fear," said the baronet, as he was about to withdraw.

"Oh, no! Your coming is always agreeable. I am never too busy to welcome Sir William Hamilton," replied Lord Roseleigh; adding, "I hope, baronet, that you will not think it necessary to use ceremony in coming h-e-r-e. Yours is no privilege, but a good right, you know, considering the relationship which is so soon to exist between us."

"It is concerning that future relationship that my present visit is made this morning, your lordship," replied the baronet. Then he went on, "has it never struck your mind, Lord Roseleigh, that this marriage might not be as agreeable to your daughter as to myself, and perhaps you? I have observed, of late, that her looks are greatly altered. The Lady Eveline has grown sadly pale and silent and unhappy-looking since I sought her hand; and I have come to tell you that I now withdraw my suit, confident that it will bring only pain and unhappiness to her, should I press to its fulfilment this contemplated marriage."

"What! Do I hear aright, Sir William Hamilton? Is this an insult you would put upon my daughter and myself?" exclaimed Lord Roseleigh, rising with haughty tone and manner.

"Nay; be not so fast, Lord Roseleigh! It is from the best and most honourable motives to yourself and the Lady Eveline that I make this great sacrifice of my own wishes and feelings. I am confident that your daughter's heart has, long ago, been given to another, and younger, and more suitable lover. One who is every way her equal, except in pride of birth. He is both noble, handsome, and talented; and he loves the Lady Eveline as tenderly and honourably as 'tis possible for man to love."

"And who may the suitor be, may I question?" asked Lord Roseleigh, in blunted astonishment and displeasure.

"He is one of our most promising artists, whose pictures are already being loudly demanded by the public. As for myself," was the reply, "I mean to do a good turn to the young man; and, as I have no immediate relatives to inherit my estates, and am getting along in years, I am about to make this artist a proposition to adopt him; and shall, in any event, make him my heir at my decease. Now, will you, Lord Roseleigh, be equally generous, and give to him your daughter, in place of bestowing her

upon an old man like myself?" asked the baronet, calmly.

Lord Roseleigh was so taken by surprise that he stood silent for a minute. He forgot to ask this young artist's name in astonishment at the strange revelation.

All the noble feelings of his own heart were roused by the generosity of his visitor. At length he started forward and grasped the baronet's hand, saying, in a choked, husky voice:

"Heaven bless you, Hamilton, for you are the noblest and best man I ever knew! You have shown more magnanimity than I, her own parent, have exhibited toward my child, and the good Heaven will bless and reward you for the deed!"

"And your daughter, the Lady Eveline, what of her? You do not say you will give her to this other lover?" questioned the baronet, smilingly.

"She shall be happy! Yes, Sir William, even though you never bestow one pennyworth upon this poor young artist my daughter shall wed him, if she lists."

"But the young man shall be my heir, I promise you. I mean it, for I have both seen and taken a wonderful fancy to him," said the baronet. "Now, go and see the Lady Eveline, and tell her our plans have undergone a change, but that she shall not be disappointed of a bridal day," he added, smilingly.

A few moment's later Lord Roseleigh sought his daughter's chamber. He tapped gently at the door, but obtaining no answer to the summons, quietly opened it and entered. And what a sight met his gaze.

Before an easel sat his daughter. Her eyes were fastened, with soul-speaking tenderness, upon the face of the portrait before her. It was that of a handsome young man, of noble features, and frank, open countenance; and whom his lordship immediately recognized as the likeness of Lady Eveline's drawing-master—young Philip Arnold. This, then, was the rising young artist of whom Sir William Hamilton had spoken—this was his daughter's secret lover!

Lord Roseleigh advanced.

"I know your secret, my dear, unhappy child, and have come to tell you that you shall be blest in the way of your own choosing! You and Philip Arnold have long loved each other in secret. I now give my consent that the future shall be bright to you both, for I no longer object to the union which shall take place when this talented young artist claims my daughter at her sire's hands."

She looked up in amazement. Could it be her father speaking? It must be that she had fallen asleep, and was dreaming before her lover's portrait. But Lord Roseleigh quickly spoke again, and undeceived her. He explained in a few short sentences how his eyes had been opened by the frankness and nobleness of the baronet. Then, as the Lady Eveline rose from her seat, he led her down to his library, and there she expressed her thanks to the waiting baronet for the great blessing he had been instrumental in bestowing upon her. A messenger was sent to summon the artist, Philip Arnold, who soon made his appearance upon the scene.

Then it was that the baronet laughingly told how he had witnessed their meeting in the garden, upon that first eve of his own wooing with the Lady Eveline.

He had come from Lord Roseleigh's presence, and was about crossing the garden as a nearer route to his own abode. Hearing voices he had unconsciously listened at the first. Then, recognizing the speakers, he had had the temerity to remain, and thus learned their secret. His own subsequent conduct had been based upon his knowledge of that evening.

And so it came about that at the appointed time there was a bridal for the Lady Eveline; but in place of the baronet, Sir William Hamilton, she was given by Lord Roseleigh to the noble and talented artist, Philip Arnold.

C. H. M.

THE SPHYNX.

QUESTIONS.

1. ENIGMA.

In summer and winter I'm seen,
Though never in autumn nor spring;
And strange to you it may seem
That to all of the seasons I cling.
With a friend or a foe you will see me
And I am to be found in each street;
In terraces, groves, lanes and alleys
With me you always will meet.
As some of my haunts I have told you;
My name now surely you'll find:
If on scanning these lines you don't see me,
I shall say you are careless or blind.

2. WORD SQUARE.

My first a foreign title is,
My next can gallop fast,
My third in every eye is seen,
When tired you need my last.

3. NUMBERED CHARADE.

My whole—which contains nine letters—is the name of a town in the South of England.

1	My	8	4	8	7	4	is a town in	Surrey.
2	"	1	8	7	3	4	"	Norfolk.
3	"	6	8	7	3	4	"	Somerset.
4	"	9	4	2	5	"	"	Kent.
5	"	1	5	2	8	4	"	Suffolk.
6	"	2	6	7	8	9	"	Lincolnshire.

4. NUMBERED CHARADE.

My whole contains fourteen letters, and is the name of a celebrated English author, and my 7, 5, 9, 4; 1, 2, 3; 7, 13, 10, 2, 12, 9, 2, 14; 12, 8, 3; 7, 8, 10, 2, 9; 7, 5, 3; 11, 8, 6, 13, 3, 8, 14; 7, 13, 5, and 11, 2, 3, 1, 8, 14 are all Scripture names of men.

5. ENIGMA.—I.

I am a perfect state of bliss
Which very few attain;
Eve knew me ere the serpent's kiss
Caused her a blush of shame.
To malice I am not inclined,
But mostly dwell with love;
If you should fail me here to find,
Pray seek me up above.

6. ENIGMA.—II.

Of all the blessings man enjoys,
I am the best; you'll own;
I'm what we all should dearly prize,
No substitute is known.
I am the greatest boon conferred
On mankind, you'll agree;
Without me pleasure is a word,
Life would be a burden be.
Not all the riches of this earth
Can with me compare,
For I'm of far more sterling worth;
So use me with great care.
Kind reader, if me you possess,
Pray preserve me well,
For when lost I cause distress.
My name now please to tell.

7. CHARADE.

My first contains a solid foot,
When used, or when on trial;
Without my second not a note
Can sound on harp or viol;
My whole, when in its proper place,
Within my first you'll view;
'Tis strange! but when you've
solved the case
You'll smile to find it true.

8. ANAGRAM.—SONGS.

- "In the lane with Tom R. Kingrugh."
- "Row, pa, neddy can 'o-old u."
- "Old cloe' Jersey man."
- "T. L.," "Come han' ma' merci."
- "C—tw asses r'e'er."
- "Any tro' era for tom."
- "I scream te' eggs."
- "Helen wont buy mi trowl s—l."
- "O, tal we wring so."
- "Next he es'r pork ben."
- "La! he robs y it."
- "Come, ma, Wil G. goes."

ANSWERS.

1. ENIGMA. Letter E.

2. WORD SQUARE.

E M I R.

M A R E.

I R I S.

R E S T.

3. NUMBERED CHARADE.

Camelford, 1. Merroe. 2. Cromer. 3. Frome. 4. Deal. 5. Clare. 6. Alford.

4. NUMBERED CHARADE.

Samuel Johnston, John, Sam, Jonathan, Tom, Jonah, Jem, Solomon, Joe, Sampson.

5 & 6. ENIGMAS. 1.—Health. 2.—Happiness.

7. CHARADE. Shoo-string.

8. ANAGRAM.

Up with the lark in the morning,
Paddle your own canoe.
Merry old Uncle Joe,
The commercial man.
Water-cresses.
A motto for every man.
Maggie's secret.
Won't you tell me why, Robin?
Walter's wooing.
The broken sixpence.
The sailor boy.
Maggie's welcome.